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SKIN SHOTS TASTER

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SO, WE MEET AGAIN – WE'VE PULLED OUT THOSE THINGS CALLED STOPS AND SPENT QUALITY TIME WITH **TAKAMI**.

THIS MONTH WE'VE BEEN IN

TATTOO HEAVEN

AND IT'S ON FIRE

THEN WE VISITED **STEF THE ITALIAN GENTLEMAN** AND THE GUYS AT **INSPIRATIONS** HAD US ROUND FOR TEA AND CAKE. NICE. WE THEN WENT TO SEE WHAT **D-GRRR** AT **CARNEVIL** HAD TO OFFER, UNCOVERED THE FINE ART OF **IAN McKOWN** AND CHILLED OUT IN **SAN FRANCISCO** WITH PERFECTIONIST **MIKE TOTH**. LATER, WE TOOK IN THE **MONTREAL TATTOO SHOW** AND DETOURED FOR A FEW DAYS WITH GRINDHOUSE DIRECTOR AND ALL ROUND GOOD GUY **MIKE PECCI**.

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ISSUE 204
NOVEMBER 2011
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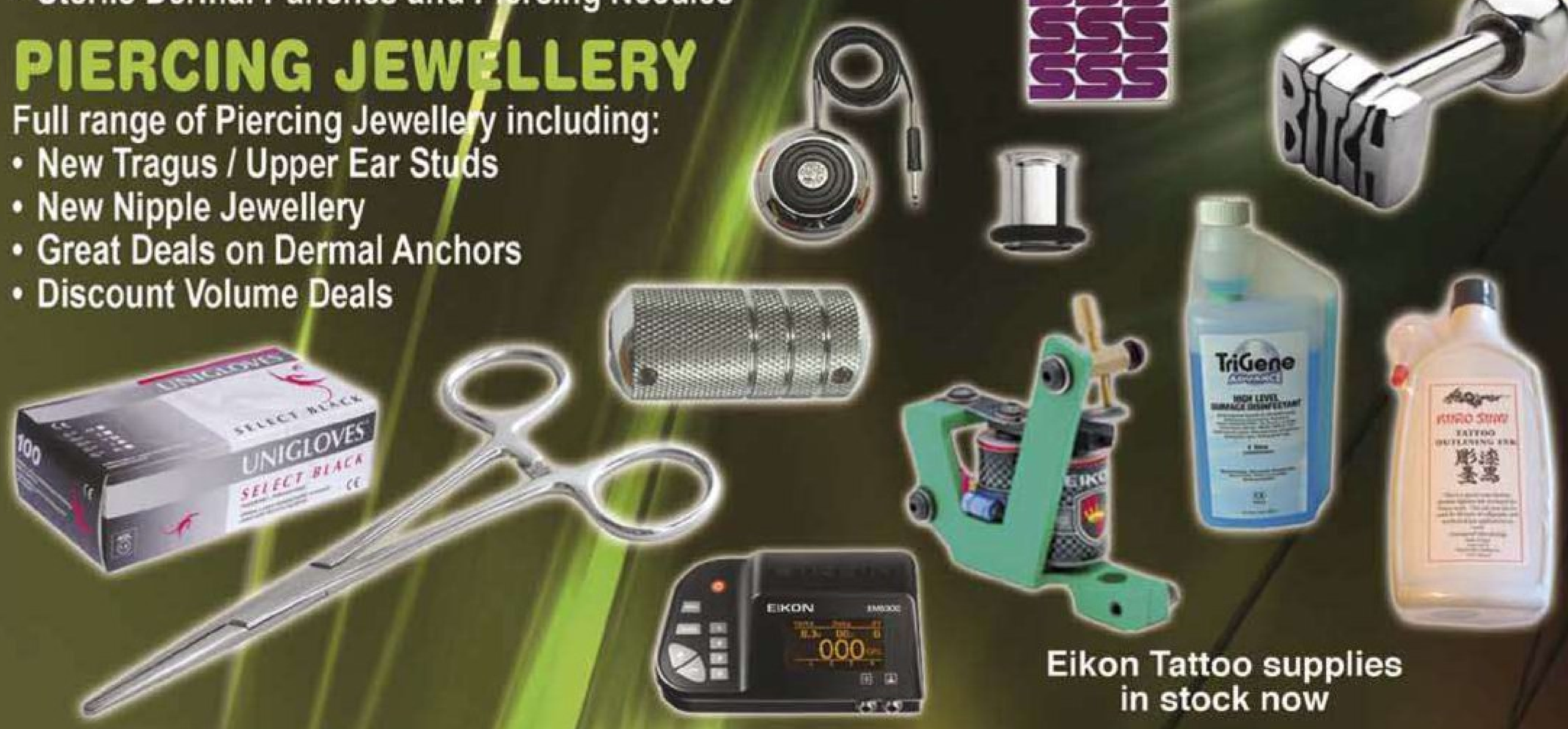
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The needle has landed



Jeff Gogue and his Best International Artist Award From Tattoo Jam. Pic: Kayla Wren.

HIS MASTER'S VOICE

This week, I was in a local HMV. You know, the place that doesn't really sell music anymore and is surviving in the high street by knocking out cheap DVD box sets. *Californication* box set for a tenner? Thank you very much…

Anyway, there was this guy in there and he had a full sleeve of 'blackwork', but I swear, I would expect to see better work come out of Krasnokamensk – a cushy Russian prison about 3,000 miles from Moscow which is probably even harsher than it sounds. His other arm was not quite so bad, but I suspect it might be by the time it's finished.

So he comes over and asks if I am me – which of course I am – and asks what I think of it. So I tell him. I tell him it's probably the worst 'collection' I have ever seen and ask him where he got it done. Thankfully he said "his mate did it" because I was dreading him actually naming a studio. When I asked him why, his response was not entirely unexpected I guess: "because I was skint and I really wanted a sleeve."

Well, he certainly got one.

I WOULD EXPECT TO SEE BETTER WORK COME OUT OF KRASNOKAMENSK - A CUSHY RUSSIAN PRISON ABOUT 3,000 MILES FROM MOSCOW WHICH IS PROBABLY EVEN HARSHER THAN IT SOUNDS

I couldn't help but reiterate my initial statement and stare in amazement while twisting his arm backwards and forwards repeating stock phrases featuring the names of dodgy biblical figures.

He looked saddened by this and it occurred to me that those who go down this road deserve to live with it. There has been talk, talk and more talk about outlawing cheap kits on eBay, shock-radio, shock-TV, hundreds of column inches in newspapers and so on, but crap kitchen-sink tattooing has been going on for a awfully long time now. I suspect it will go on for an equally long time in the future. No amount of legislation will stop it because if kids want to do it, they will find a way whether that be with a cheap kit or homemade machines built from instructions online.

Is this really the answer? Take the piss, show them some good art and get on with your own life? Maybe it is. Surely, enough time has been wasted pandering to idiots when genuine collectors and artists are running 24/7/365 to show the world what it can really be like. If tattooists were prepared to take a stand and refuse to do a cover up of a kitchen sink hatchet job, then maybe, just maybe, with a little bit of patience, we'd start seeing it slow down. The statement "fuck off you prick" said with the required amount of vitriol can hold a lot of weight you know…

… and the guy had never even heard of *Californication*! What the hell is the world coming to?



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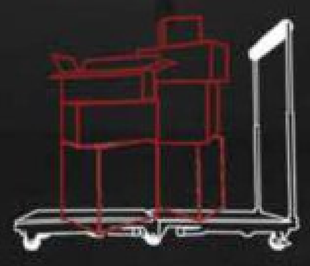
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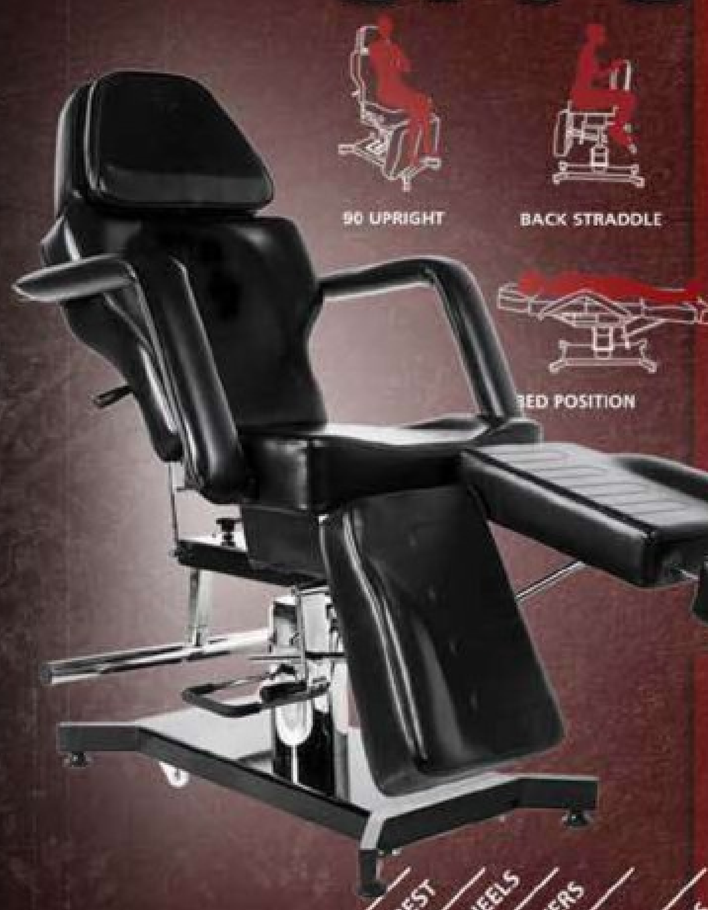
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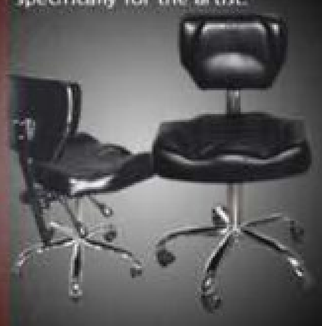


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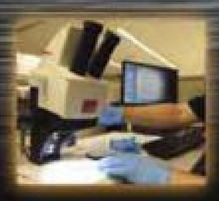
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Regrets? Paula has a few, but none are ink based. Watch and learn…

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A life on the road is not so easy as you may think…

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Currently doing a guest spot at Mick Tomo's Ruby Arts, come check out the genius that Takami has going on.

82 **MIKE TOTH**
Out in San Francisco, the quest for perfection continues at a heavy pace…



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CELEBRITY SKIN

MIKE PECCI, EVERYBODY LOVES A GRINDHOUSE MOVIE DON'T THEY? DANGEROUS GIRLS WITH TATTOOS AND GUNS? BRING IT!



THIS MONTH'S SUPPLEMENT: SKIN SHOTS SAMPLER NEXT TATTOO ARTIST INSIDE



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READER PROFILE

WE'RE NOT SURE HOW WE'RE GOING TO TOP HAVING A CLOWN AS A READER PROFILE. WE'LL WORRY ABOUT IT LATER...



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STUDIO PROFILE

INSPIRATION TATTOO STUDIO MATT HART AND HIS CREW. CAUGHT IN THE HEADLIGHTS!

SPECIAL FEATURES

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Continuing our series on tattooists who are no slouch with a brush, we're pretty sure you'll be as blown away as we are with this…

86 **ART TATTOO MONTREAL**
Is it that time of year again already? Apparently so – thankfully the temperature remains above zero for the time being.

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ALL SUBMISSIONS TO SLEEVE NOTES GRATEFULLY RECEIVED. BE IT NEWS, AN EVENT, NEW MERCH, A STUDIO MOVE... WE'LL DO OUR VERY BEST TO LET EVERYBODY ELSE KNOW ABOUT IT TOO. EMAIL: **EDITOR@SKINDEEP.CO.UK** OR IF YOU WANT TO BE ARCHAIC ABOUT THE WHOLE AFFAIR: SKIN DEEP, THE OLD SCHOOL, HIGHER KINNERTON, CHESTER CH4 9AJ. BRING IT



DEAL OR NO DEAL?
BIG DEAL!

This month, we have some exciting goodies (pictured) to give away from Big Deal Cloth All you need to do (yep, it's another crazily hard comp for you to enter) is send an email to *editor@skindeep.co.uk* with the subject line BIGDEAL. Let us know some basics like male/female along with a T-shirt size. Winners will be chosen at random, so we'll be in touch if you're a winner. Good luck!

GUEST SPOT
SHODAI HORIMASA AT NINE



Japanese tattoo master Shodai Horimasa will be attending the Brighton Tattoo convention next January. He will then be guesting at Nine in Brighton between Jan 31 to Feb 4, 2012.
You can find more information at: *www.nineboycesstreet.com*. You can see his work here: *www.myspace.com/horimasa*

SHORT SLEEVES

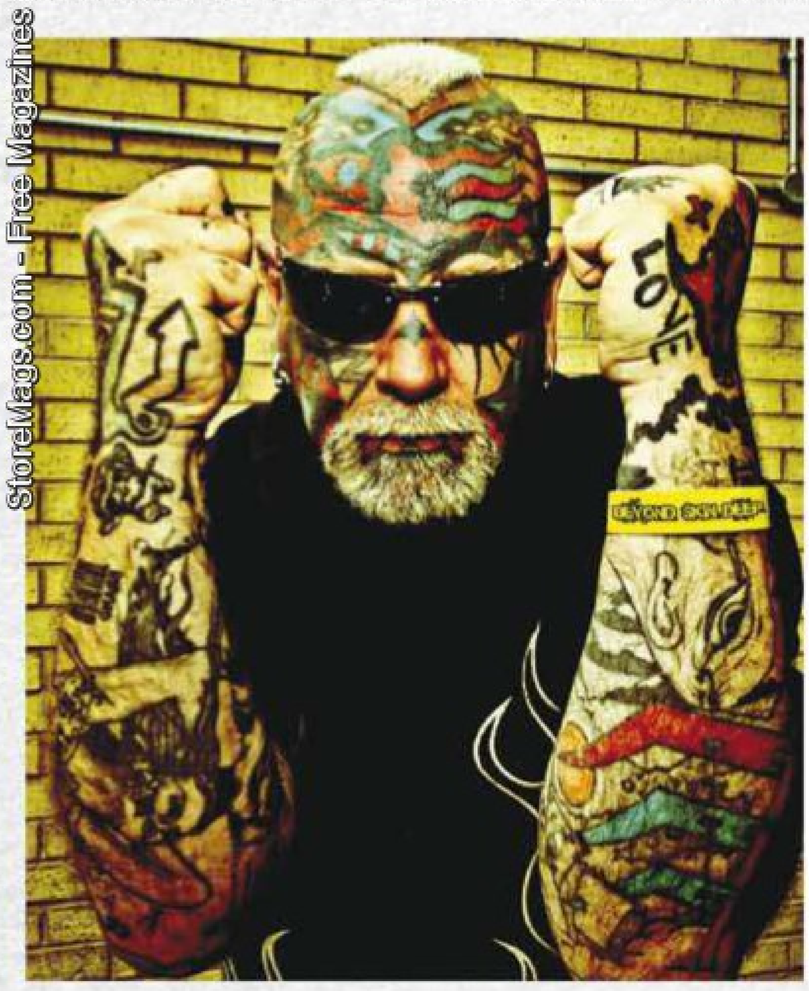
PLANT SHOW

Fresh off the back of a phenomenally successful show a few months back, our good buddy Joe 'Wildcat' Plant is at it again. If you missed the last one or couldn't make it, you can catch up with his brilliant art at UNIT 7, EAST YARD, CAMDEN LOCK, LONDON NW1. This all happens between October 15-23, with the opening night festivities from 6-9pm on the night of the 15th.



REDS ON THE MOVE

Red's Tattoo Parlour is an international award-winning tattoo studio – and it's moved! After trading in Manningtree for six successful years, they have outgrown the shop and moved to 123 Colchester High Street. Priding themselves on being a friendly and welcoming tattoo studio with an open plan policy giving access to the artists rather than being blocked by a receptionist, they offer quality tattoos, permanent make-up, laser tattoo removal and skin divers & dermal anchors. Check out the website at: *www.redstattoos.co.uk*, or give them a call on 01206 766606.



ASK SCARY GUY!

Skin Deep has invited modern day philosopher and world traveller The Scary Guy to share his wisdom and knowledge with you! Scary is a good friend of Skin Deep and an expert in tattooing the hearts of minds of millions of people worldwide. We figured it would be very cool to give him a stage here to converse with readers directly.

Scary is an expert in determining the root causes of the emotional experiences that manifest themselves in the psyche and tells it like it really is. So let's get it on - that thing that's under your skin that's not ink, share it with Scary Guy and get it off your chest.
You can email Scary Guy your letters right now: *scaryguy@skindeep.co.uk* – names will be changed to protect the innocent, guilty and all those in between.

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SHORT SLEEVES



INTEGRITY LOUNGE

After several years tattooing out of the Tattoo House in Dewsbury, Phil Webster and Gazz Hunter have set up their own shop, **The Integrity Tattoo Lounge in Ossett**.

"The Integrity Tattoo Lounge is a Studio where the art of tattoo is the most important factor, our motto is 'bespoke and custom'. We want to do individually designed tattoos for everyone. We both have different preferred tattoo art we like to do, but we also love to cover all styles of tattooing. As artists we feel it important to discover and push our abilities and ideas through consultation with each of our clients. We thank all our friends, contractors and family's for such great support and love we have received."

39 Dale Street, WF5 9DB Ossett. Telephone: 01924 271881.



MORE TEA?

With the absolute majority of us probably littering our houses with cool art-type stuff, take a look at the ceramics coming out of David Williams' house! After tattooing for 20 years, David turned his hand to these rather fine house additions. You want one. I want one. We all want one. Get one. Check out the range at *dancingplates.co.uk* – everything is made in the UK and hand-painted. Totally safe to use on a daily basis as well… what more could you want? Dare I say: Christmas is on its way…



HANNYA MASK PROJECT

Worthy causes seem to be around every corner these days, so much so that it's hard to feature them all, but this one really caught our eye simply because of the global scale it's being run on. The Hannya Mask Project will be presented at Laughing Samurai's Twelve21 Gallery by FX Artist Nix Herrera and tattoo artist Ant Iannucci of Ascension Tattoo, to benefit relief for the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami victims in Japan. The exhibition features 50 hand-painted Hannya Masks, by some of America's best tattoo artists, conventional artists, sculptural artists, and body painters.

This all happens on Saturday, November 19, 2011, with all pieces being sold via silent auction both at the premiere night and online. The bidding will continue after the opening. A larger percentage of the proceeds will be sent to the Red Cross for the Japanese relief effort. Make no mistake, they still need help. What better way to donate to a great cause than by winning an amazing, one of a kind, custom piece of art. With it being in Florida, we'll assume most readers won't be able to make it, but you can still sign up to receive updates and return to *www.hannyamaskproject.com* on November 19 and the weeks after to view these fantastic masks, and most importantly, make a difference to the world by placing your bids.

We'll bring you as much coverage of the exhibition as possible along with an exclusive look at some of the masks in a future issue.



VERY COOL

OIL PAINTING OF THE MONTH

She might be in the news again for all the wrong reasons, but when Greg Sumii shipped in this example of one of his oils, we couldn't resist. Killer work! We'll be featuring Greg and his work in a coming issue not so far away… stay tuned (If you can't wait, you can find Greg over at *towertattoos.com*).



DON'T FORGET

The new issue of Skin Shots (available now) features all the award winning work from Tattoo Jam this year - plus 10 tonnes of other great art too!

Conventions

All details correct at time of going to press.

October 9

1ST ANNUAL FEMALE TATTOO ARTIST SHOW

The Assembly, Spencer St, Leamington Spa, England. 50 of the UK's best female tattoo artists come together for the very 1st time.
www.facebook.com/pages/Uks-1st-Annual Female-Tattoo-Artist-Show/212251892134100
Tickets are on sale at *leamingtonassembly.com*

October 14-16

BRUSSELS TATTOO CONVENTION

Tours & Taxis, Brussels, Belgium
www.brusselstattooconvention.be

October 15-16

SZOLNOK TATTOO EXPO

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www.szolnoktattooexpo.com

October 21-23

OTTAWA-GATINEAU TATTOO EXPO 3

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ottawatattooexpo@hotmail.ca
www.ottawatattooexpo.com

October 29-30

HALLOWEEN TATTOO BASH

The Racecourse, Newton Abbot, Devon, England
www.myspace.com/halloweentattoobash

November 4-6

FLORENCE TATTOO CONVENTION

Fortezza da Basso, Firenze, Italy
www.florencetattooconvention.com
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November 12-13

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eastcoastexpo@hotmail.co.uk
www.myspace.com/eastcoasttattooexpo

November 18-20

GOA TATTOO CONVENTION

Club West End, Saligao, Goa, India
www.tattoo-convention-indianink.com

2012

January 13-15

SURF 'N' INK TATTOO CONVENTION

Gold Coast Convention & Exhibition Centre, Gold Coast, Australia
www.tattoosurfnink.com

January 15

TATTOO FREEZE

Telford International Centre
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Seems to be the norm that whenever we get bulky packages sent in from Germany, you don't even have to open them to know that great things probably lurk inside…

This month is no exception. A slim package arrived recently containing issue 15 of a magazine called **Inside**. But to simply call it a magazine would be rather unfair – once opened, we found it was more like a labour of love on paper. I've never seen anything quite like it and as you can probably figure out from some of the artwork reproduced here, it's no ordinary magazine.

Steered through stormy waters by Jenz, who calls it an 'International Artscum Magazine', it began life around 20 years ago as an independent black and white trashzine. Now I have a full set of back issues to go with it, I see the trains of thought as it has developed into what it is today, which is a high-class collaboration between some of the most talented art lunatics in the world.

To say it was extreme and not for everybody, would be an understatement, but if you like your art close to the edge (and I'm talking really close here), you really should get in touch with Jenz and buy a copy. He builds it from scratch by himself: "sometimes I think I have to do this to clean my graphical karma from all of this daily commercial crap working as a freelance designer!"

This current issue is real peach. You can get yourself a copy by checking out the website here: *inside-artzine.de* or email Jenz here: *jenz@inside-artzine.de*, or if you're still a non-believer you can find more over at their deviant art page at: *inside-artzine.deviantart.com*.

Some things should be supported simply because they exist. This is one of them. Luckily, it's all rather special. Do it!

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Conventions

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BRIGHTON TATTOO CONVENTION
The Racecourse, Brighton, East Sussex, England
www.brightontattoo.com

February 19
NORTHWICH CHARITY TATTOO & ART EXPO
Winnington Park Recreation Club, Northwich, Cheshire, England
www.northwichtattooexpo.co.uk

February 25-26
INTERNATIONAL TATTOO & ART
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www.tattooart.co.nz

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eddie@ehardiman.orangehome.co.uk

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THE SCOTTISH TATTOO CONVENTION
The Corn Exchange, Edinburgh, Scotland
www.scottishtattooconvention.com

March 31-April 1
THE SCOTTISH TATTOO CONVENTION
The Corn Exchange, Edinburgh, Scotland
www.scottishtattooconvention.com

April 1
INK & IRON TATTOO CONVENTION
The Tower, Reservoir Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, England
www.inkandiron.co.uk

April 13-15
NORTH WEST TATTOO SHOW
(formerly The Killybegs Tattoo Convention)
The Abbey Hotel, Donegal Town, Ireland
Info: Ruth or Liosa from Zombie Dolls Tattoo Parlour on 00353 74 9722440
northwesttattooshow@ireland.com

April 14-15
2ND TATTOO EXTRAVAGANZA PORTSMOUTH
Pyramid Centre, Southsea Sea Front, Portsmouth
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www.tattooextravaganza.co.uk
tattooextravaganza@live.co.uk

May 19-20
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Tea Party Rodbur Suite, Northampton Saints, Rugby Ground
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SMALLMAN SYNDROME

Hello everyone, hope you've had a marvellous and ink-filled month. I'm having severe withdrawal symptoms; it's been well over two months since my last tattoo and for me that's just far too long



Thing is, it's not like I've been getting tattooed since I was young and reckless. No, I waited until I was in my 30s and reckless. I often wonder whether I'd be a lot more inked by now if I'd have started earlier (I didn't get my first tattoo till I was 25, and my second till I was 30), or if I'd regret any of the work I'd had done.

Let's be honest. My life probably would have taken a much different turn if I'd have started getting inked earlier on, and I'd be pretty much covered in stuff by now. I know I wouldn't regret anything, mind you... I never do – and I am a man with a Ron Burgundy tattoo and two ill-thought out matching designs that I foolishly had with ex-girlfriends. You would have thought I would have learned after the first one that it's a definite death knell of any relationship that I'm involved in.



Can anyone reading this match or beat me with a rate of complete failure at getting matching tattoos with other halves? My current girlfriend has been warned that if either of us ever start making noises about having similar designs that it's time for both of us to run screaming from the building. There is bound to be someone who is worse at such things than me... well, apart from Jordan.

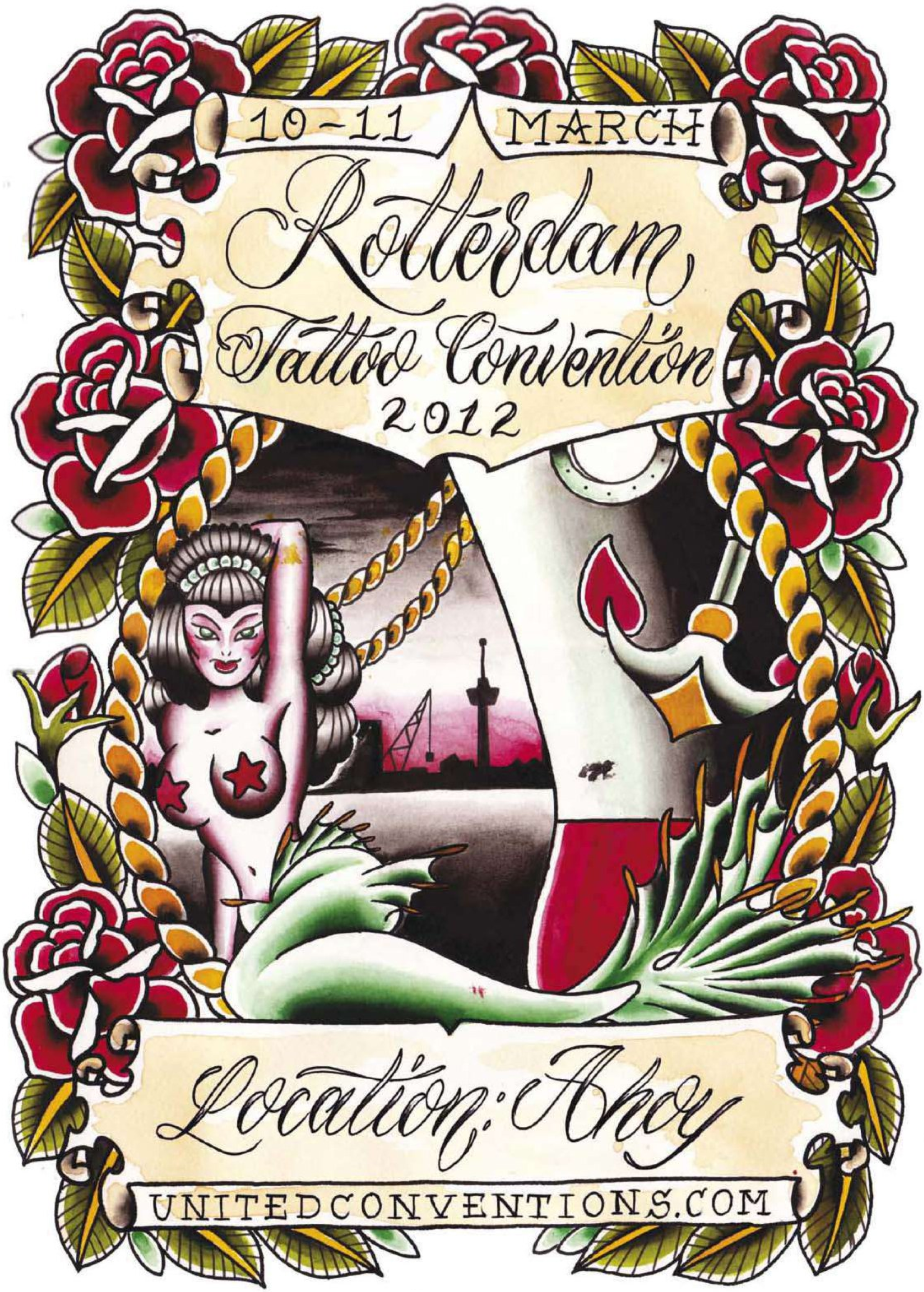
When I left university I got a sensible office job for a fair while, before I started doing stand-up. I was always told there that I wasn't allowed visible tattoos (which probably explains why I waited a while). If I'd have had some when I was jobseeking I wouldn't have been able to get that job, so would have gone into doing something else. Maybe then I wouldn't have started doing comedy as an escape from my monotonous existence, and then I certainly wouldn't be swanning off around the globe telling people stories about how I got engaged by accident to one of the girls I've got a matching tattoo with. Oh yes.

What I guess I'm saying is this: when I started getting my tattoos I think I was ready to grow into being the person that I want to be now, and that's probably why they're so utterly ridiculous. On the flipside of that, I met some cool guys recently who weren't even 20 yet and were pretty much covered. It suited them and I couldn't imagine them any other way. They looked ace and I was jealous of how much work they'd had done.

So my point? Get tattoos. Get loads of them, as many as you want. And when should you get them? Whenever you feel ready. They'll look awesome, and no matter what the reasons behind them are, they're bound to add to you rather that just define you.

But seriously, if you can beat my record for ill-advised matching ink, do get in touch. It'll make me feel better!

Email jim@skindeep.co.uk **Website** www.jimsmallman.com
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PART ELEVEN

PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

The call of Sydney with its legendary status among all the world's great cities was never too far away on this road trip. Finally, Craigy Lee arrives in the promised land – and finds himself amongst a metropolis of polar opposites



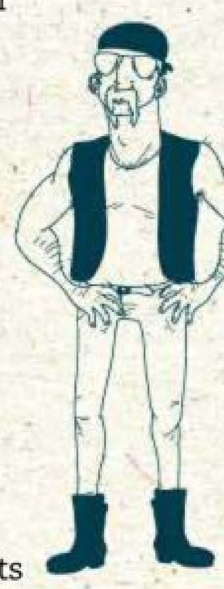


The best view from a tattoo chair

Sydney is probably the place most people think of when you mention Australia. The Opera House, the Harbour Bridge and Bondi Beach are all images tourists flock to every year to experience a piece of this awesome city; and once we arrived, I was already sold, buff beach bodies, tanned faces and a big city with beach living. Our last fleeting stop here was to work the Sydney Tattoo Expo and was far too short. So while Melbourne is certainly Australia's arts capital I was interested to see what Sydney had to offer aside from the token postcard images – I wanted to get beneath its surface. So I'm back in town to work a guest spot at Platinum Ink, based just outside the city centre on the Paramatta Road.

The shop boasts a huge studio area where I will be working alongside head artist Jane and apprentice Ivan, funnily enough I find out that Lucky Diamond Rich (see issue 202) worked here when the shop first opened. Back then Jane was the apprentice and after years of hard work, now looks after the daily running of things. Her style can vary to suit each customer, but it's her black and grey work that really grabs your attention.

The thing I love about Sydney is the next artist for anyone to meet is only ever around the corner, and that is Newtown. It seems to be the trendiest place in Sydney, a little like Camden, bars, cafes, book shops and vintage clothing stores line the streets

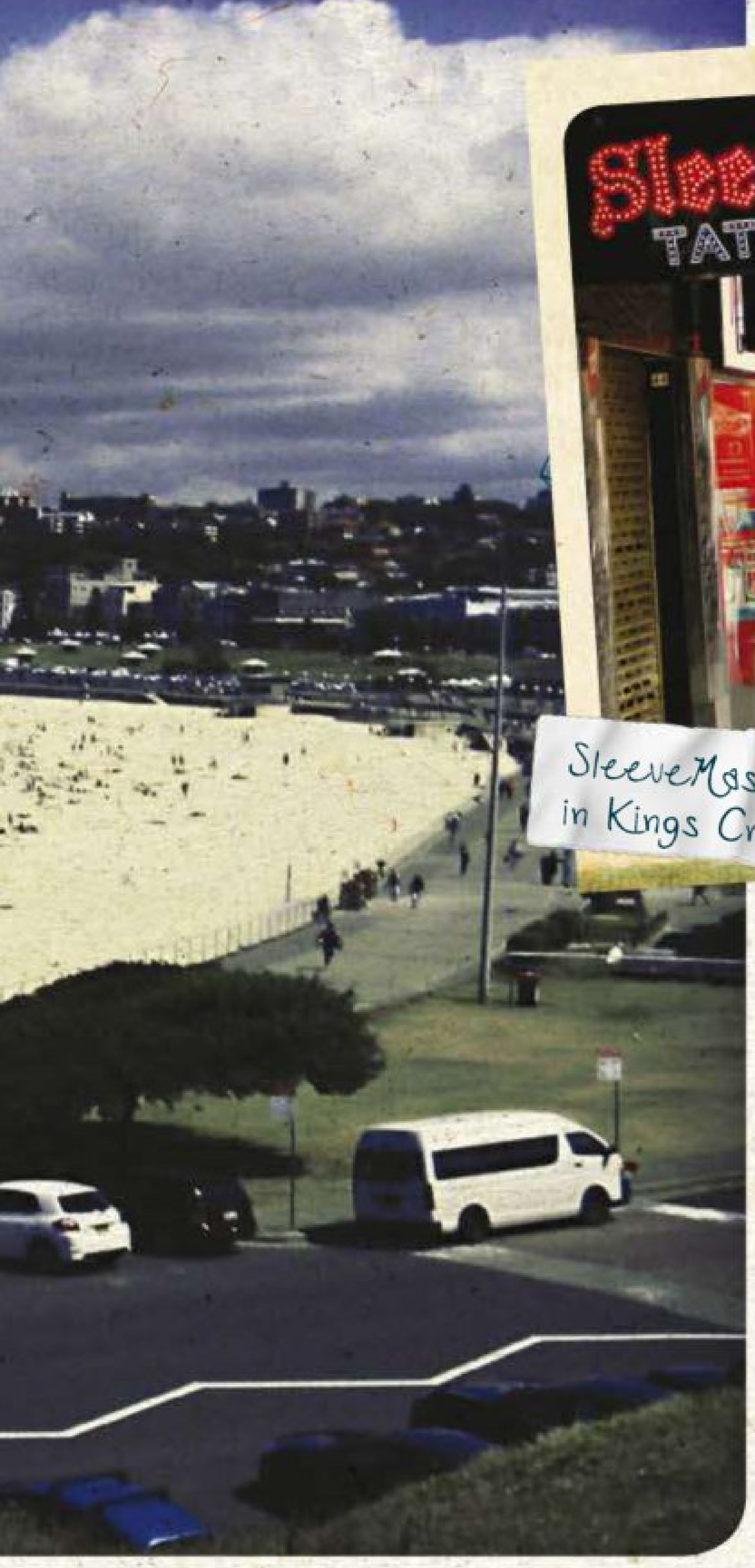


Craigy Lee

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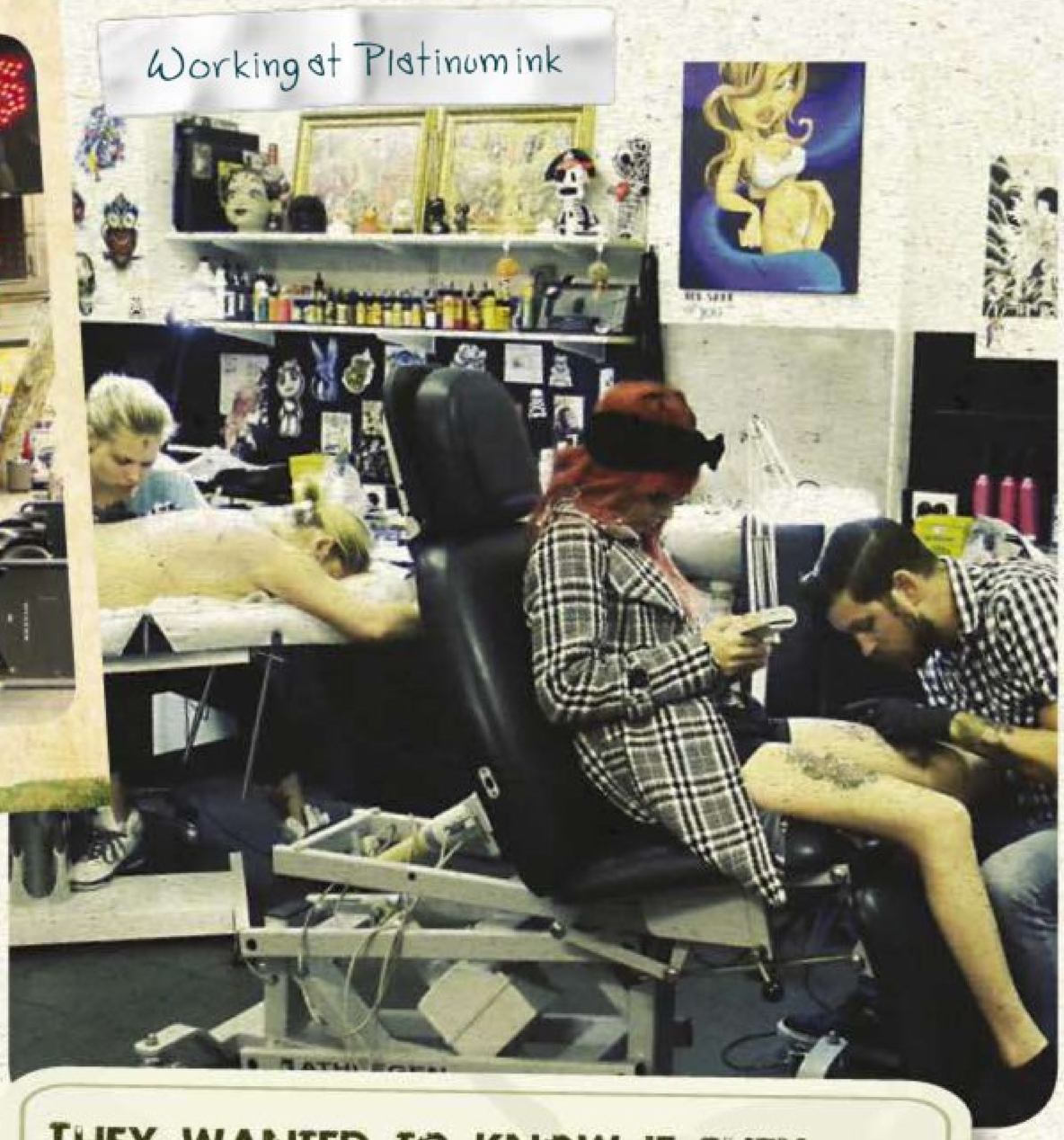
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SleeveMasters in Kings Cross



Working at Platinum ink

THEY WANTED TO KNOW IF THEY KNEW ANYONE, WITH DISTINGUISHING TATTOOS, WHO HAD HAD A POSSIBLE ALTERCATION WITH A BIKE GANG, AS A PIECE OF HUMAN SKIN HAD BEEN FOUND IN THE ALLEY...

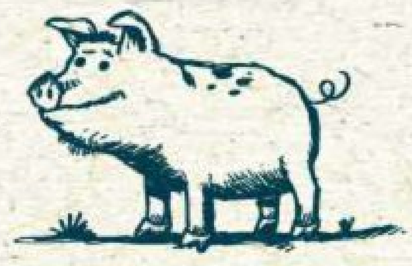
with Skin Deep Tattoo and King Street Tattoo both satisfying the tattooing needs of the 'trendy set'. And from one corner to a very different kind is Kings Cross, the red light area of the city, which boasts a lively night scene but is a little more rough and ready. Sleeve Masters occupies this strip and is open 10am till 4am every day. It claims to be "the busiest tattoo shop in the world", and such a claim warranted a visit.

Upon arrival I find a small and dated shop that fails to deliver anything other than walls covered top to bottom in generic flash. Where it fails in presentation it certainly makes up for in stories (if you want to know you will have to ask yourself). If there was ever a place to cut your teeth in the tattooing world this could very well be it.



From the seedy underworld, I venture to the beautiful world of Bondi Beach. As you walk down the main strip amongst the sun loving, bikini clad population it is clear to see this is a place where the truly beautiful (if rather plastic) people of Sydney reside. Over-looking the beach in a prime location is Bondi Ink, where I have arranged to meet up and chat with its owner and artists. My first impression of the shop is it's a very different environment to any studio I have previously visited in Australia. The whole place is open plan, two artists work in the front window over-looking the beach; with a location like this there is possibly no better view for a customer to look out onto while you inflict a bit of pain on them. The shop is extremely busy, open seven days a week and is home to 13 artists who work two shifts. It's not just your average street shop either, they have resident artists from France, Brazil, New Zealand and Australia and deliver every style of tattooing their ever-demanding 'tattoo savvy' customer could want.

When we arrive, owner John is in the chair having some more work done on his leg by French artist Niko. "The whole place is set up to be inviting and customer friendly," John explains. "Touch screen computers enable clients to browse portfolios and flash while the openness of the shop allows them to see how clean the working environment is, removing any stigma they have about tattooing." In fact, when they decided to move the shop a year ago from the backstreets to the seafront, they had a lot of reservations from the local council. That all changed when the council arrived to inspect the shop John tells me laughing. "They said it looked cleaner than a dentists surgery, to which I replied, 'it is!' We have had no problems ever since."



As I wander around, I ask the customers how they feel about being tattooed in the front window for everyone passing to see and the general consensus is "it's great", and to be fair, this is Bondi. Most of the people passing are hot girls in bikinis and topless men with surf boards, such a thing must surely be distracting for the artists but they assure me that, "after a while, you just forget about it." I think I will have to take their word for it!



Everything here at Bondi Ink is aimed towards the customer and getting rid of the negative attitudes that Sydney has been plagued with due to a majority of biker run shops and it is going a long way to change perceptions.

During our time here, there have been many reports of biker gangs



trying to close shops and even burn down rival tattoo studios making headline news across the country. Thankfully I have not experienced any of this first hand, but an incident did happen when I was working at Platinum Ink.

One Saturday, shop apprentice Ivan was getting in some tattoo practice on a piece of pig skin. At the end of the day, proud with his first attempt at tattooing, he got his stuff together and went home. On his arrival home he realised he must have left his prized piece of art back at the shop, apart from the smell it may begin to generate over the next few days he thought nothing of it and enjoyed his weekend. Tuesday morning rolled around and the shop opened as usual when two serious looking guys walked in and introduced themselves as detectives.

As things unraveled, the detectives tell the artists that a side-street had been cordoned off and an investigation was underway into a possible bike gang murder. They wanted to know if they knew anyone, with distinguishing tattoos, who had had a possible altercation with a bike gang, as a piece of human skin had been found in the alley. The bemused Ivan realised it was in fact his prized pig skin that had been misidentified as the bike gangs victim. Needless to say although the detectives were relieved, they didn't see the funny side of their blunder.

Anecdotes aside, things are slowly moving forwards. Australia's biggest tattoo convention is held here in Sydney, and along with the other shows around the country they operate a 'no club colours or patches' policy. The industry is trying to disassociate themselves from the biker image and show the public that tattooing is about the art. Indeed, even today biker gangs are still a problem across Australia, and overwhelmingly so in Sydney. It is the bikers strong-hold which has been suppressing the talent of this cities brilliant tattoo artists, bubbling under the surface, who usually leave in order to seek out the freedom of custom shops in other cites in Australia.

Sadly for a lot of the artists I spoke to who dream of opening their own custom studios in Sydney freely, the reality it seems is still a long way off.



Tattoo I did at Platinum Ink

THE WHOLE PLACE IS OPEN PLAN, TWO ARTISTS WORK IN THE FRONT WINDOW OVER LOOKING THE BEACH AND WITH A LOCATION LIKE THIS THERE IS POSSIBLY NO BETTER VIEW FOR A CUSTOMER TO LOOK OUT ONTO WHILE YOU INFLICT A BIT OF PAIN ON THEM.



John at Bondi Ink



Inside Bondi Ink

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Over 25 years Experience

the clown

Warren Speed is well known in the burlesque and freakshow world, having performed all round Europe with his high-energy brand of physical comedy, which usually ends in him revealing nipple tassles, followed by ass tassles...

But before that, he was a stand-up comedian for seven years where he gigged regularly with the likes of Alan Carr, Sarah Millican, Jason Manford and Russell Howard. And this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Mr. Speed or 'Pervo the Clown' as he is sometimes known.

"Although I had some great times doing stand-up, and I got to work with many talented people who are now household names, I always found stand-up to be highly stressful. It's hard trying to make a roomful of often drunk or even disinterested people laugh, especially when you can be getting constantly heckled throughout. So I decided to move into burlesque instead, as I've always been an exhibitionist – plus as a guy doing burlesque, you need to do it much more for laughs. Physical comedians like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton have always been my heroes so burlesque naturally fitted me much better. And I'd much rather strip and make an idiot of myself than do stand-up.

"The highlight so far, of my burlesque career, has been performing in a two-week run of shows in a big variety show in the Casino De Paris alongside Dita Von Teese. That was a great time and I had so much fun. Another highlight was performing at the London Burlesque Festival in 2009 with performers from all around the world.

"Besides burlesque, I also run my own events promotions company called, Growling Clown Entertainment. Previously, we organised the annual Newcastle Gateshead comedy festival for four years, as well as running many stand-up shows (Funny Bones comedy clubs), theatre variety shows (under the name Cabaret Excentrique), and the now semi-legendary bizarre club night, 'House of the Golden Lotus'. This club night always features weird and wonderful performers, including the UK's only freakshow tent!



Trent Aitken-Smith / Warren Speed

THE FREAKSHOW
Freak shows were popular in the United States from the mid 19th to mid 20th centuries, and were often, but not always, associated with circuses and carnivals. Some shows also exhibited deformed animals such as two-headed cows, one-eyed pigs, and four-horned goats) and famous hoaxes, or simply "science gone wrong" exhibits. Changes in popular culture and entertainment, and changing attitudes about physical differences, led to the decline of the freak show as a form of entertainment. As previously mysterious anomalies were scientifically explained as genetic mutations or diseases, freaks became the objects of sympathy rather than fear or disdain. Laws were passed restricting freak shows for these reasons.

> I'M NOT A CASINO GAMBLER, ALTHOUGH I AM A BIT OF A RISK TAKER IN LIFE – I THINK YOU HAVE TO BE IF YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE THINGS ON A LARGE SCALE.

"In 2009, I wrote, co-directed and starred in what is fast becoming a global cult movie – the comedy horror film *Zombie Women of Satan*. The movie is currently on release on DVD in the UK, USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Japan. *Zombie Women of Satan*, was a dream come true for me. I'd always been aiming to break into movies and in the end I decided to just go for it and ploughed all my life savings into making a daft horror film, where practically all the zombies are sexy topless girls and the heroes of the film are a strange bunch of freakshow performers. I play a dozy clown, called Pervo, who has many issues and really hasn't got a clue what he's doing. The movie was shot on a very low budget, but we've achieved miracles with it by getting distribution deals in four continents. We also got massive global publicity at Cannes in 2010 when we took six sexy zombie girls over to promote the film and the press went mad for us, which opened a lot of doors.

"I'm currently working on a new movie script which is kind of Charlie Chaplin meets Hellboy, but again it features some freaks and the lead character is a strange jester. I love

freakage.com
www.skindeep.co.uk



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the bizarre side of life and have performed at some pretty outrageous shows in places like Amsterdam, Rome, Oslo and London. I love the old world of vaudeville and freakshows and always try to bring that element of weirdness into my current projects.

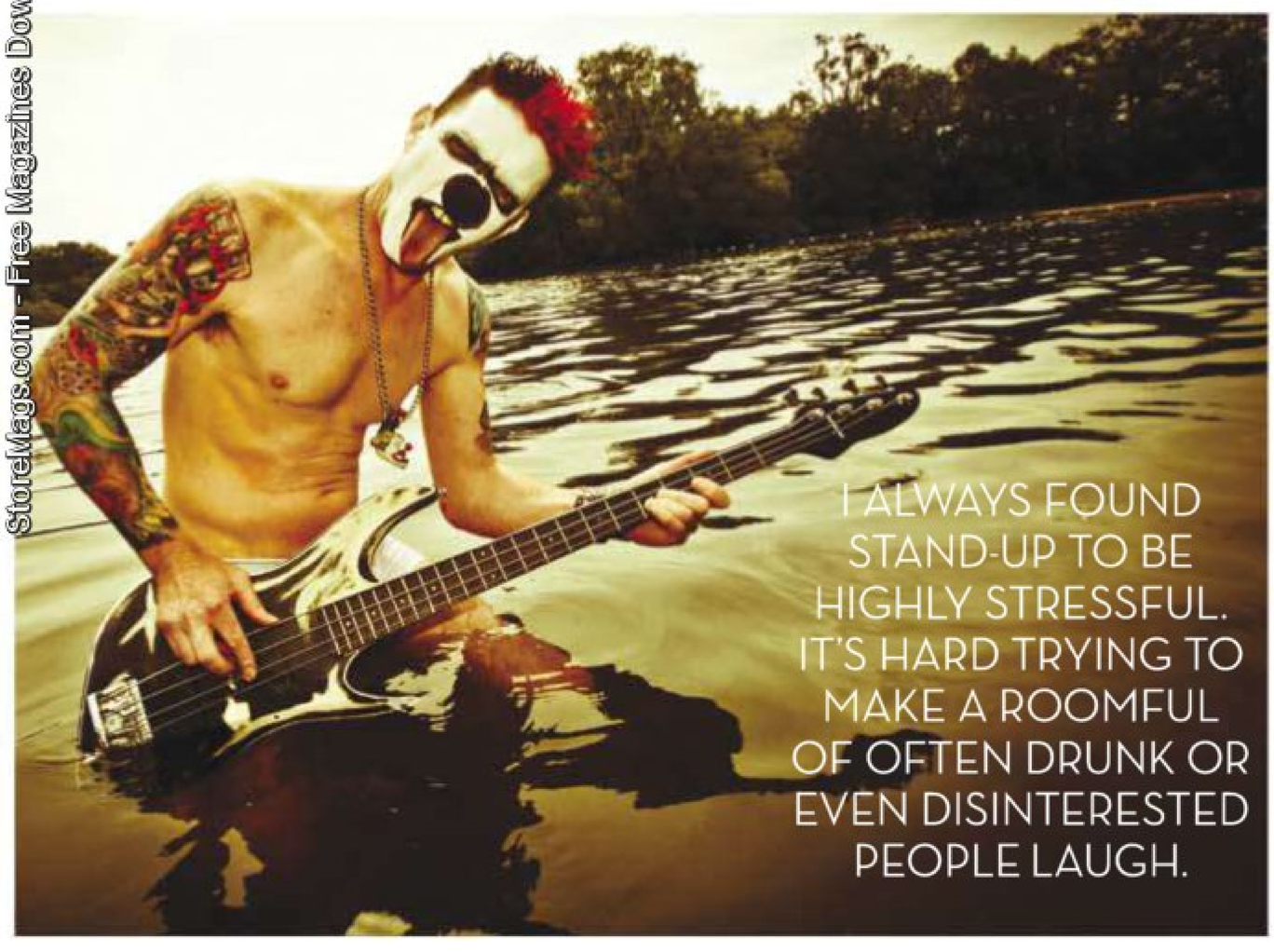
"My main focus now though, is the sleaze rock band I'm in – Kings & Queens. I used to be in bands years ago, but have finally gone back to my roots and my first love, which is music. I'm really going all guns blazing to see how far we can take things. We're currently recording our first album and have just shot our first music video. Hopefully once we've paid our dues and moved up the music ladder a bit I can start bringing all my ideas for a crazy stage show into reality. And once again it will all be angled towards the weird and bizarre side of things.

"I get all my tattoos done by Chris Wright, who owns and works in Viking Tattoo Studio in Jarrow, along with his brother Lee. Besides both being great tattoo artists and top blokes, they're also both in an awesome punk band called Crashed Out. I started getting tattooed relatively late in life despite always liking them and being around them since I was about 13. Guess it must be because I've always been a total heavy metal music fan!

"The clown freak on my right arm is actually the logo of my entertainment company, and on my left arm sleeve (which I got completed from start to finish in about seven sessions over two months) I have a bizarre jester and a top-hatted skeleton, plus flames and gambling kind of images – which I personally like. I'm not a casino gambler, although I am a bit of a risk taker in life – I think you have to be if you want to achieve things on a large scale.

"I'm getting more freakshow images, flames and theatre masks to make up my left arm sleeve too. My chest has a vintage microphone, an endless sky and the words 'Rock 'n' Roll', which again sums up my love of music and refusal to accept there are limits on what you can achieve. When I eventually get my back piece done I want it based on Commedia Dell'Arte which is where a lot of modern day physical comedy and circus performances originating from Italy back in the 1600s."





THE FREAKSHOW 2
The appeal of the traditional "freak shows" is arguably echoed in numerous programmes made for television. Thus, programmes like Extraordinary People or BodyShock show the life of severely disabled or deformed people, and can be seen as the modern equivalent of the freak shows. In order to make the shows respectable, the subjects are usually portrayed as heroic and attention is given to their family and friends and the way they help them overcome their disabilities. The Guardian's Chris Shaw commented that "one man's freak show is another man's portrayal of heroic triumph over medical adversity".

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THE ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE

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D-GRRR

Working out of Carnevil – his very own 'Cabinet de Tatouage' – D-GRRR is one of the hottest tattoo artists working in France today, but to say his talent extends way beyond the needles is an understatement

SO DENIS, WHY GRRR?

It came from a comic book onomatopoeia. I'm a big grouch; nothing ever goes right, everything irritates me. At the start, there were two 'Rs', then I added one because it's a bit like the three stars.

BEFORE YOU WERE A TATTOOER YOU WERE AN ILLUSTRATOR, HOW DID YOU START?

In 1985 with the cover for the first 45rpm vinyl by MST, a French group. At that time, I was hanging out and drawing in a squat. I met a guy with a skull and Indian details tattooed on his shoulder. It wasn't too bad; the guy set us up with Christian in Belleville.

Still at the squat, a biker came to show us some machines. I kept illustrating while working on the side; I doubted being able to make a living right away. What's more, I had a rather distinct line, but it caught on, especially in the universe of role-playing games, and sustained me. I thank those people because it shaped my artistic direction and encouraged me in my choices.

In 1986, I returned to see Christian as he was opening his shop. I drew flash for him and he gave me my first tattoo. Then I designed his shop front, still under the exchange principle – a good method with a twist when there's artistic value. It was a good time with a different ambiance from today.

AND THEN?

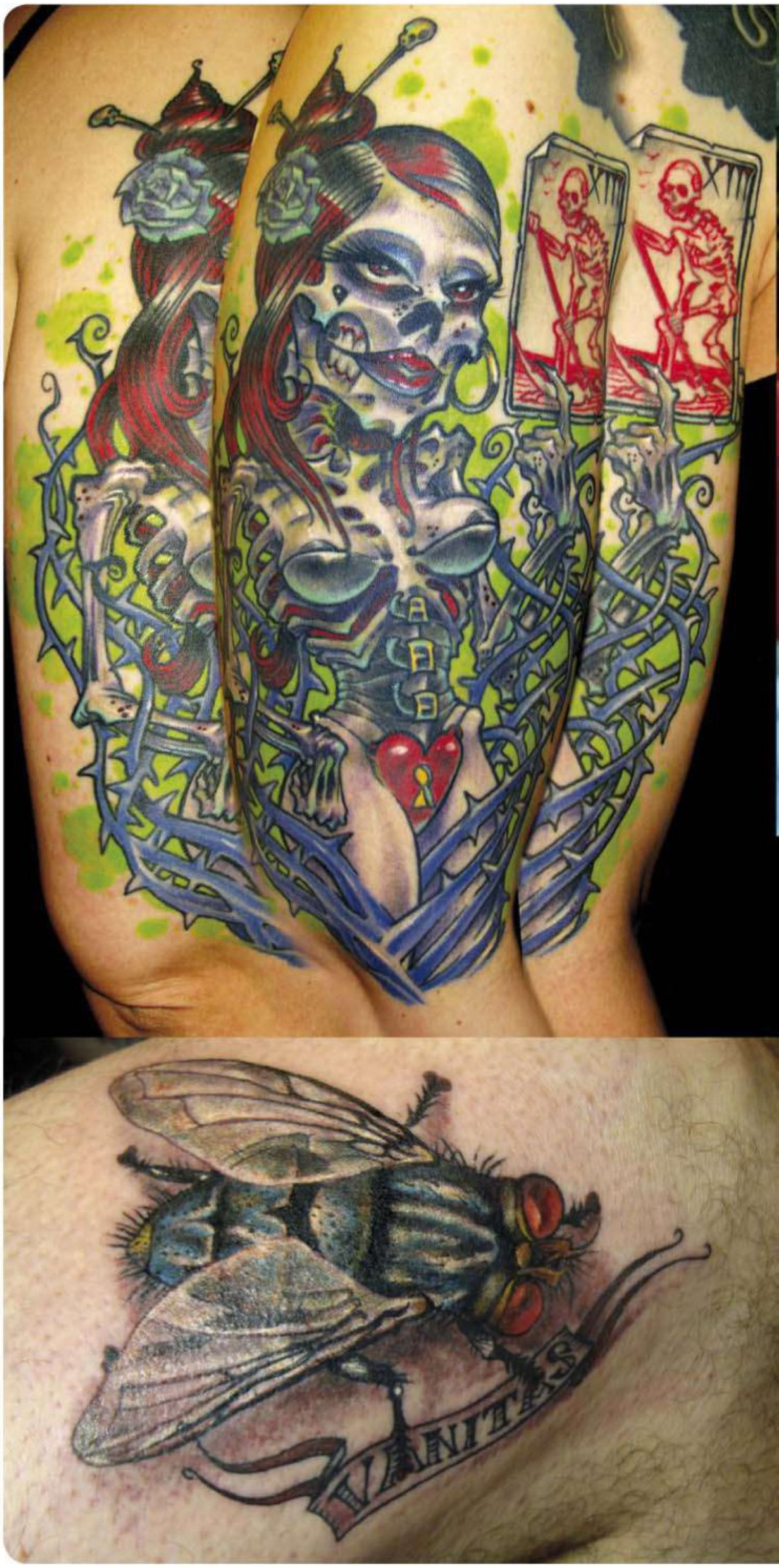
I made T-shirts, album covers, notably for a damn good Belgian rock 'n' roll band called La Muerte. Then I did murals; I've been an all-surface illustrator since 1990, more specifically an all-surface, pagan illustrator. I also got up to no good with a brush for a comic book company in Angoulême.

I wasn't a tattoo artist at that time, but I drew designs for people who would then have them tattooed. One day I was asked why I wasn't tattooing but I wasn't really motivated; I had to rethink my technique entirely.

At the same time, I spoke a lot with Christian. He explained the rigour, hygiene – I trod slowly for a little while before really throwing myself in. The issue was to feel the work and in 2002, I dived in.

HOW DID YOU MAKE THE TECHNICAL TRANSITION?

When I paint, I paint a black background and then I trace an outline in blue before adding colors – I go from darkness to light. Tattooing is the reverse. That's why it's difficult; I had to turn my brain around.



Trent Aitken-Smith © Warren Speed

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For me it was a real fucking challenge. At 37, I learned to sweep and reset the meters back to zero.

I wanted to confront this discipline, in regards to my work and also relationships with people. Tattooing is an exciting adventure. People are the only judges, and for now they're coming back. It's a rather good sign.

WHAT ARE YOUR INFLUENCES?

I really like the 19th century and the so-called firefighter painters, the symbolists… it goes back to medieval etchings. I like everything that is 16th and 17th century; it's magnificently prolific, especially starting from the 14th century. All that is Dürer is, by contrast, very small so you have to enlarge it.

There are depictions of angels and demons, especially demons who have a crazy energy. I really like florals as I love art nouveau; girls are clearly a part of my clientele. I try to take things from the source. There is a big influence of art nouveau, art deco for my biomechanical, I'll see floral, insect, bone – there is a lot of observation work.

TATTOOING IS EVOLVING, ESPECIALLY IN ARTISTIC QUALITY IN EUROPE, THE US, JAPAN, AND GUYS ARE EMERGING IN CHINA, PERU – IN SURPRISING PLACES

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THE CATHOLIC RELIGION REALLY INTERESTED YOU… WHAT DIFFERENCES DO YOU SEE WITH YOUR PAST AS AN ILLUSTRATOR?

It's an evolution. I keep the spirit of illustration and I re-adapt, but I love free hand. It's really in that technique that you realize the relief, the configuration of the surface on which you work. I work more and more like that than on paper. Sticking as close to the body as possible while developing a design is what interests me. Of course, complete confidence from the client is needed, and it's that symbiosis that I search for.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU REFUSE?

People who come and ask me for a 'Filip Leu' or 'Hernandez' do not interest me. Shit, these guys have worked for years to develop their style! I am my own student and my own master. My style is GRRR. I make GRRRméca… GRRRold-school… I like this phrase from Félicien Robbes, an iconoclastic, erotic painter from the end of the 19th century: "Robbes I am, another I cannot be." I am this expression. GRRR I am, another I cannot be.

THE SHOP YOU WORK IN IS VERY UNIQUE - CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT IT?

I have an interest in everything that is bone, human anatomy. You create your own shit around you.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF TATTOOING TODAY?

Tattooing is evolving, especially in artistic quality in Europe, the US, Japan, and guys are emerging in China, Peru, in surprising places. In any case, it's a popular culture and therefore global. Tattooing must remain a little bit 'apart' but at the same time accessible. We cannot stop at a few styles. Tattooing is vast. It's a fully-fledged artform.

OPEN ALL HOURS

We know for a fact that not only collectors and fans read Skin Deep, but also those who work relentlessly hard at surviving in these trying business times. So this issue, we thought we'd take some time out to say a few words on what it takes to run a successful operation. While it's by no means comprehensive, it will hopefully give both newcomers and those established something to chew over...

It all starts with a dream. As cliché or trite as that may sound, the reality for anyone who has their heart in the right place when it comes to tattoo is that they are for the most part, following a dream. From an early interest in drawing and the art of tattoo, countless young artists have followed their instincts, building up the portfolio that hopefully will one day get them that coveted apprenticeship. From there it's a ton of work, ultimately culminating in that day when they are finally able to tattoo and are fortunate enough to be making a living from it. Yet as great as that time is when an artist is finally doing what they love best in the world for a living, there is all too often something more that they crave; another goal that has yet to be conquered... owning and operating their very own tattoo studio.

Studio, shop, whatever you want to call it (just please don't call it a parlour), for many it is the holy grail – that fabled height of tattoo aficionado-dom that brings notoriety, respect and customers waiting months just for the privilege of setting foot in your kingdom. Finally you'll be able to do things your way, with all the freedom in the world to make people sit up and take notice of you. But a few months after opening your doors, you're starting to find that the months of bookings you had expected aren't happening. The phone isn't ringing and when it does, it's a collection agency following up on unpaid bills. Your entire life savings went into this place and all you now have to show for it is a financial time bomb ticking away much too quickly. How could your dream have turned so suddenly into a nightmare?

Part of the immediate problem rests in the misguided notion that simply because an artist knows tattoo, that they're well enough equipped to run a business. The realisation of this mistake all too often makes for a grim underscoring of the essential fact that despite being a craft with thousands of years of legacy behind it, tattoo is also a business. For many it's an unpleasant truth to face; that such a cherished art form shares something in common with generic places of business such as McDonalds and Starbucks. Unfortunately, on a business level, a tattoo studio has to play by at least some of the same rules as the aforementioned greed-heads. At only 29 years of age, Paul Acker has become one of the worlds must respected artists in the field of horror realism. Locked into a sinister world of b-movie icons and slasher flick imagery, his tattoos are as vibrant and detailed as he himself is humble and unassuming It's entirely safe to assume that anyone who runs a successful tattoo studio is already well aware of this.

According to British business website The Times 100, one in three new businesses fail in their first three years of operation. Make no mistake about it: there is nothing simple about starting and running a successful business and anyone who wishes to get things off the ground is going to need money. It might sound like an obvious statement, but a lack of funds is a major cause of a business failing.

Don't just assume that getting the door open to your new place is enough. That's only the tip of the iceberg. Some might say don't bring a knife to a gunfight and in this sense, the statement rings true. Opening a business is one hell of a fight, so be ready to seriously take it on. Make sure you have a sizeable amount of cash stashed – at least enough to keep your doors open from six months to a year. Don't plan on making any money during this time and in this way, you'll be ready for the worst and working to prevent it, rather than thinking that each day is going to be a perfect financial success, only to be caught completely unprepared when things don't go your way. If you make money in your first year, great. If you don't, then at least you'll be able to keep your doors open and your power running while you figure out a way to get the clients in that you need to keep you in business.

YOUR ENTIRE LIFE SAVINGS WENT INTO THIS PLACE AND ALL YOU NOW HAVE TO SHOW FOR IT IS A FINANCIAL TIME BOMB TICKING AWAY MUCH TOO QUICKLY. HOW COULD YOUR DREAM HAVE TURNED SO SUDDENLY INTO A NIGHTMARE?

Mike Jones As credited

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IF A TATTOOIST WHO RUNS A STUDIO CAN'T BE BOTHERED TO IMPRESS ON THE OUTSIDE AS WELL AS ON THE INSIDE, THEN HOW CAN THEY EVER EXPECT TO ATTRACT ANY CLIENTELE

Next, it's essential to know your market and to understand how to tap into it. One way of doing this is most certainly through your art, but if you're young and no one knows who you are yet (a problem in itself), the options exist to wait and build up your reputation a little before opening your business, or, to come out gunning with a game plan that will help to put you on the right playing field from the beginning. What that game plan may be differs from person to person, but the important thing is to actually have one right from the start. Unless you have a limitless supply of cash, time and patience, this isn't the time or the place to improvise. Acknowledge and understand that it isn't just a matter of opening your doors one day and hoping that people will pile in, one after the other. Put yourself out there in such a manner that will directly target tattoo enthusiasts, art enthusiasts and anyone else that you feel can and would be a part of your demographic. Even handbills/ flyers are fine, but put some solid effort into them and highlight a sample of your art in them. As a tattooist, it goes without saying that you'll always be striving to be on the top of your game and to improve. The same can be said for being a small business owner. This means that you need to project the best if you want to be the best. Don't cut corners, don't cheap out. Get the best equipment that you can, make your studio as comfortable, as inviting and as stylish as you can. Have your portfolios organized and presentable.

Whatever method you choose, understand that your marketing techniques need to be tight. This means planning. Organise your ideas, strike out one by one and see what works. Again, spend the money that needs to be spent to get the word out about your place. Don't make handwritten signs advertising half-priced tattoos and stick them to your doors and windows with tape. If you or your studio look budget, you aren't going to attract clients. If a tattooist who runs a studio can't be bothered to impress on the outside as well as on the inside, then how can they ever expect to attract any clientele? Come off as professional in every aspect of the work that you do. When in doubt, ask yourself if you'd want to be tattooed at a place that looks and acts like yours does.

Lastly, enough can't be said about the importance of location. If you can't afford the rent in a decent area, wait and save until you can. Furthermore, if you don't have a lot of money to spend on advertising, a well chosen location can help gain you a little more notice. Get a space where the sort of demographic that you are looking to tattoo can easily find you. In other words, if all you want to tattoo are walk-ins, then don't get a place on the outskirts of town that is only ever accessed by a few buses and a train line that no one rides. Be in the centre of things as much as you possibly can. It might cost more, but that extra bit of cash that you spend could very well be the difference between success and failure.

In the end, running a small business is hard enough as it is without adding on the constantly challenging aspects of being a professional tattooist. With the right amount of money, a whole lot of patience and a whole lot more hard work, good things can happen. Don't expect everything to happen off the start and be prepared to roll with the punches. Beyond that, all that can be said is to not jump into things prematurely. Sometimes you only get one shot at making your mark. Make damn sure that shot is a good one, and good luck.

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GYPSY ROAD

The Italian Gentleman, or Stef as he is better known to his friends, is one of the tribe of artists who have hit the road in recent years. Not just for the experience, nor for the added influence you can pick up. No, Stef is one of those artists who choose to pitch themselves against the world, harbouring the ever burning question: "Just how good am I in the grand scheme of things?

"Before working professionally as a tattooist I did every kind of job imaginable. You name it, I did it. You could spot my gypsy soul from miles away. It's been really good to see what working hard means and to become flexible in different environments. That has been fundamental in my life on the road. I haven't had any formal apprenticeship – it's not easy to get one in Italy. So I'm basically self-taught, which has meant a couple of years with total dedication on getting as much information as possible, taking in conventions to see the professionals doing their magic, hours spent after work 'til late drawing and 'studying' magazines..."

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IT MUST BE SOMETHING IN THE ITALIAN GENE POOL THAT MAKES SO MANY GRAVITATE TOWARDS THE ROAD AND SEE WHAT THE WORLD HAS TO OFFER, BUT STEF HAS BEEN TRAVELLING MORE THAN MOST. WHAT MAKES A MAN DECIDE TO HIT THE ROAD SO HARD - AND SO PERMANENTLY?

"The first thing that made me leave my home was that I basically couldn't get a job there. So to work professionally, I had to find a shop that would hire me. And this at the time would mean the UK. The first years have been hard. Hard at work, hard with the people and with the language, but I had great support from my girlfriend at the time (without her, I wouldn't be here today) and my closest friends, and simply pushed through that.

"Then it just seemed to come together all at once; one change after the next. Mainly to keep learning as much as I could from many artists from all over the world to keep getting better. The other reason is my gypsy soul – I'm curious about life, people, places, emotions..."

DO YOU THINK THAT WORKING LIKE THIS IS SOMETHING ALL TATTOOISTS SHOULD DO? AS AN ARTIST WORKING ALL ACROSS THE WORLD, YOU MUST BE EXPOSED TO A LOT OF WORK THAT MAKES YOU WORK HARDER THAN EVER.

"I don't think that it should be 'mandatory' for every artist. You should follow your vocation. But for sure, challenging yourself with different realities opens your mind and gives your brain some fresh air. It's definitely a positive experience.

"And yes, getting exposed to so many different artists, styles, standards and attitudes has been the reason for me to push myself harder and harder to be able at least to do what the other people were doing. It's really hard for me to accept failure, I set pretty high standards when it comes to expectations on myself.

"I have been working with a lot of people; some of them really good at what they do. But I guess the experience that always challenges me most is working with Henning at Royal. Henning and Beppe (Shiro) in particular are the two best examples I look at for commitment, professionalism, technique and attitude. No bullshit. Another shop I work at that set high standards is Cult Classic in Romford. Great tattoos, fantastic organisation, ridiculously funny...

"Then my norwegian family at LUCKY 7 keeps it real with real old school tattoos and rock 'n' roll. As do JFK at Studio XIII in Edinburgh – ask

USUALLY, WHAT I PAINT ENDS UP AS A PRESENT FOR FRIENDS – LIKE ME, NONE OF IT REALLY HAS A HOME













YOU SHOULD FOLLOW YOUR VOCATION... CHALLENGING YOURSELF WITH DIFFERENT REALITIES OPENS YOUR MIND AND GIVES YOUR BRAIN SOME FRESH AIR

him for the butt on the butt on the butt!"

HMM. THIS TURNS OUT TO BE A STATEMENT THAT STEF CHOOSES TO KEEP THE MEANING OF TO HIMSELF, BUT I FILE IT IN THE BACK OF MY HEAD FOR FUTURE RESEARCH ALL THE SAME. HE'S ALSO BEEN HANGING OUT WITH OUR OLD PALS AT BUENA VISTA.

"Working with Volko and Simone and all the crew of Buena Vista has been a really nice experience. As artists, their work speaks for itself and as people, they have been exquisite, opening the doors of their shop, their town and their house to me. I'm really thankful. And this is as good a place as any for me to express a special thanks to Dani, the girl that does all the work behind the scene at Buena Vista. Indispensable!"

TRAVEL SAFE!
If you're interested in hitting the road yourself, you may like to know that bus is the safest way to travel with only 4.3 deaths per billion journeys, though if you want slice the statistics a different way, a plane is far safer with only 0.05 deaths per billion kilometres. Surprisingly, you're also better off in your car than you are on water. Maybe not so surprisingly, the worst offender whichever way you slice it, is the motorcycle.

A LIFE ON THE ROAD, PARTICULARLY A SOLITARY ONE IN WHICH YOU DON'T HAVE A CREW TO ASSIST IN THE TRANSPORTATION OF ALL YOUR PARAPHERNALIA, MUST BE DIFFICULT SURELY? HOW DOES A MAN IN THAT POSITION FIND THE TIME AND SPACE IN WHICH TO CREATE ART? IS IT SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO WAIT UNTIL THE MAN GETS HOME?

"Actually I don't know what 'home' means. It's just me, my suitcase, lots of flights, shops and hotels. For the last few years I haven't been based anywhere, so 'home' is where I lay my hat! The easiest thing to carry is watercolors as they don't take too much space – when I'm not too busy preparing stuff for clients, I try to take the time for painting. It relaxes me."

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TAKING A MOMENT TO LOOK THROUGH STEF'S PORTFOLIO. ONE THING IS FOR SURE, ASIDE FROM HAVING HIS OWN STYLE WHEN LET OFF THE LEASH, HE IS NO SLOUCH WHEN IT COMES TO BEING AN ALL-ROUNDER! IS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AN IMPORTANT THING TO ALLOW HIM?

"I have been going through different styles over the years. I started with photorealism, then new school, now more of a traditional approach. As I said before, I'm really curious and challenge myself, so I like to try a bit of everything. Obviously, over the years you go toward the expression that better fits your personality. I like to work different styles to avoid getting bored – though as you can see, I love to do roses – but my favourite I would say, would be traditional American and Japanese and some fine-line black and grey. Main rule: simple, clean, solid, vibrant.

"I would like to clarify my belief that this is more of a craft than pure art. You have to know your tools, the rules of the body such as aging and flowing, the traditions that originated particular styles. And within these limits, you can express yourself.

"These days, I find there is a bit too much of the 'rock star' attitude around tattooists, mostly due I think to mainstreaming on TV and the wrong image of this as an 'industry' for fashion victims. People that would never think about this as a profession are getting into the trade just to exploit it as a business. There's a Theo Jak and Phyl Kyle interview that says it all. I much prefer the old idea of an underground world, with some mystery around it. Today that is a bit lost.

"But going back to the question, often, especially with friends, it happens that you have complete freedom and that's when you can do what you really like and enjoy. It's obviously nice when people leave you some freedom, giving a basic idea and then it's up to you to develop it and put your skills and experience at their service. If you trust an artist – and regardless of where you find yourself, you should always check the portfolio first, there is too much shit around to waste your money and time – you should let him translate visually what's in your mind. He knows best what works and what doesn't on the skin."

I DON'T KNOW WHAT 'HOME' MEANS. IT'S JUST ME, MY SUITCASE, LOT OF FLIGHTS, SHOPS AND HOTELS. FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS I HAVEN'T BEEN BASED ANYWHERE SO 'HOME' IS WHERE I LAY MY HAT!

SO WHERE DOES AN ITALIAN GENTLEMAN GO NEXT?

"If I have to be honest, I take it day by day. It doesn't make sense for me to plan to far ahead. The only thing I know is that I want to stop soon and work as a resident after so

WHAT WE LEARNT

The "you are here" arrow on maps is called an ideo locator.
Chances that an American lives within 50 miles of where they grew up: 1 in 2.
People began surfing in Hawaii before Columbus sailed to America.
In London the tube route from Leicester Square to Covenant Garden is the most popular tube route for tourists despite the fact that it is actually quicker to cover this distance on foot!
Tourists visiting Iceland should know that tipping at a restaurant is considered an insult.
A quarter of Russia is covered by forest.

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much traveling. I think when I'm not traveling doing guest spots, I'll be based in Scandinavia.

"Artistically, I want to explore more mediums, but I guess that will have to wait until I have my own place – hopefully rent a place to use as a workshop to get dirty. Oil, acrylics, wood, glass… whatever, no limits. It's good to get out of the tattoo scheme of things and set yourself free to express whatever you feel like. One thing I would like to do is to collaborate with friends and in a year or so, put together an exhibition for fun. Who knows!"

I PREFER THE OLD IDEA OF AN UNDERGROUND WORLD, WITH SOME MYSTERY AROUND IT. TODAY THAT IS A BIT LOST

IS THERE ANYWHERE ON YOUR TRAVELS THAT HAS BEEN NOTHING LIKE HOW YOU EXPECTED IT TO BE? A PLACE THAT HAS MAYBE SHOCKED YOU BY HOW MUCH TALENT THERE IS THAT NOBODY EVER TALKS ABOUT - OR EVEN SOMEWHERE THAT IS SUPPOSED TO BE GREAT, BUT DIDN'T MEET YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

"So far so good, you know. I've always been pleasantly surprised by the places I have been to, for many reasons. A place that has surprised me for quality of artists has actually been Australia. When it comes to customers, I would say Oslo – people ask for cool stuff out there, more old school oriented."

STEF'S ART IS SOMETHING THAT PARTICULARLY DREW ME INTO HIS WEB. I LOVE HIS FLASH AND HIS WATERCOLOUR WORK REALLY APPEALS TO MY SENSIBILITIES. WHERE DOES ALL THIS WORK CALL HOME WHEN IT'S FINISHED?

"So far, I mainly use this for practical reasons of traveling. Usually, what I paint ends up as a present for friends – like me, none of it really has a home. But I'm slowly getting a bit more organised and with hopefully more time available in the future, I may develop other mediums and use of the artworks. I would love to collaborate more with other artists as well."



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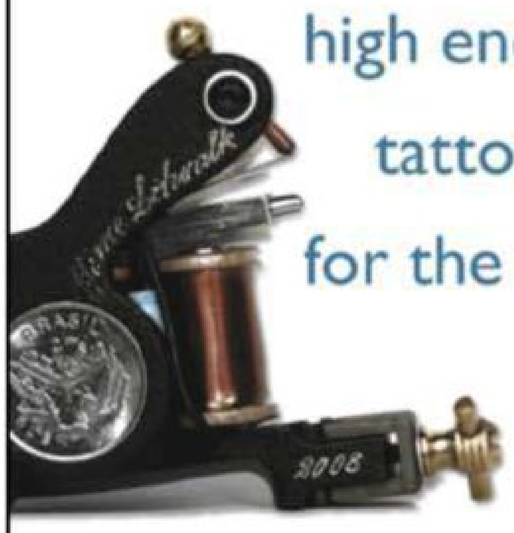
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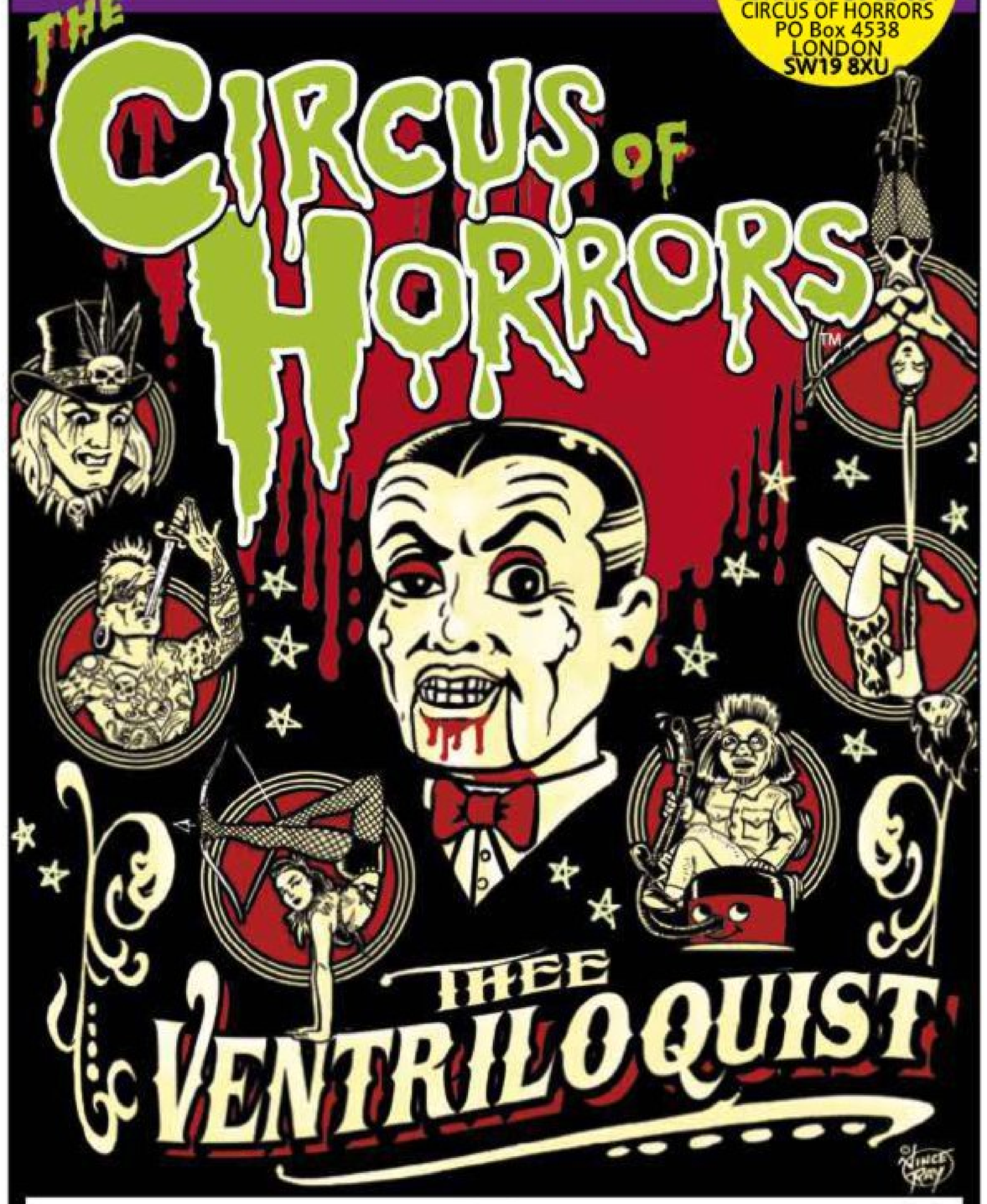
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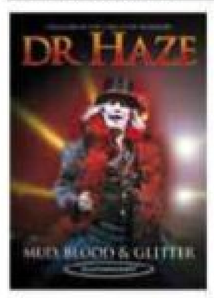


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WARNING: The Circus of Horrors contains some nudity and language of an adult nature, it is not suitable for children, sissies or chavs. This show contains nuts!

THE EYES OF A STRANGER

The more and more I delve into the tattoo world, the more I am inspired by the artists out there plying their trade. We aren't talking about guys and girls who can just copy stencils, or colour in pictures on skin; we are talking about genuine artists...





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Long gone are the days of the tattooist just being a tattooist; nowadays, these guys could have their work hanging in galleries around the world. One such artist is Ian Robert McKown, a tattooist working out of Denver, Colorado. Ian has been tattooing since 2003, but in 2007 he picked up a paintbrush and tried his hand at a different medium. Going on his clean, deep, accurate realistic tattoos, one should have guessed that his paintings were going to be good, but saying they were just good is an understatement. Ian's paintings rock. Hard!

"I began tattooing mid-2003 in Boulder, Colorado. It was a small street shop and I tattooed under an artist named Chris Smith. My apprenticeship was short as I had to move out of state. I moved to New Mexico and worked for a few shops out there, namely Exotic Expressions (no longer a shop) and American Graffiti (owned by Andy Barela... the artist who tattooed my face). After a couple years I moved back to Denver and began tattooing at Bound By Design. I've always found myself drawn to what some would call 'realistic' tattoos, but only recently came into my own in regards to finding my own style within this genre of tattooing.

I HAD NEVER BEFORE HAD AN EMOTIONAL HIT FROM A PIECE OF ARTWORK. IT WAS A REVELATION. I CANNOT STRESS ENOUGH WHAT AN EYE-OPENER SEEING HIS WORK WAS FOR ME

"It was late 2007, early 2008 that I first picked up a brush and began oil painting. I'd done a small amount of acrylic work before that, but nothing that really had much significance. Believe it or not, the majority of my art before oils was more new school tattoo-related stuff. I think we all go through the phase of drawing and making tattoo flash.

"Whilst perusing some art magazines one day, I came across an article written by David Leffel, a representational Realist painter who paints in the classic Flemish/ Dutch old master style. I had never before had an emotional hit from a piece of artwork. It was a revelation. I cannot stress enough what an eye-opener seeing his work was for me. It was as though I was seeing art for the first time in my life. From then on out, for the most part, I mainly painted portraits and still-lifes. I find this type of work very rewarding. I've been able to bring together some of my painting and tattoo styles, combining them into something fresh, and hopefully unique. I think the longer I worked towards that style of painting, the more and more my tattooing came to follow suit."

Following this revelation, Ian dived head first into the world of painting.

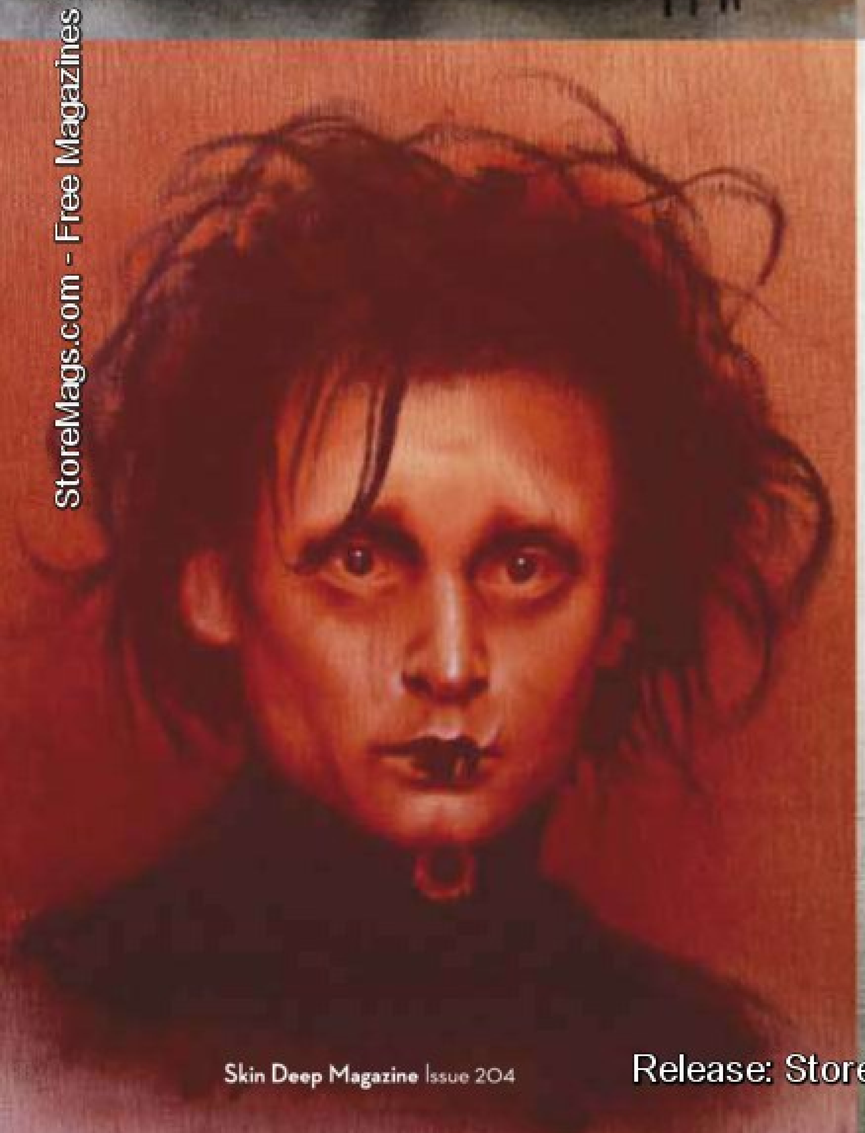
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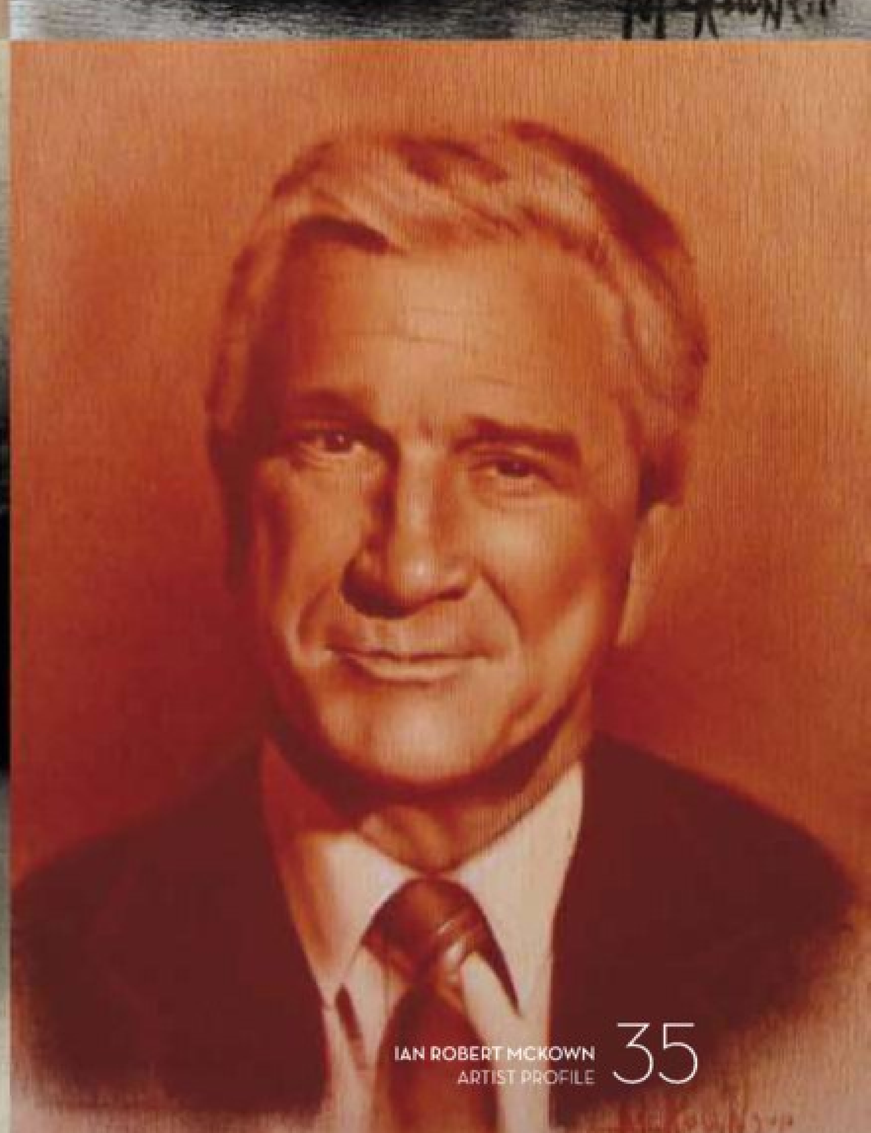












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Since then, he has produced a huge amount of work, exploring different styles and techniques, while at the same time still producing amazing realistic tattoos. So how does it all come about in Ian's world?

"I have spent the last year working more or less in a monochromatic style, but I'm now moving back into full colour. I like to paint emotions people often miss, or would rather not see; sadness, pensive silences, the quietude of a person alone with their thoughts. I enjoy darker imagery without the all-out bluntness many artists strive for.

"Even though I've made strides to maintain a certain look or style in both tattooing and painting, they are still both very different animals. They share certain similarities, obviously, one being that if the customer wants something simple and straightforward, say a skull or something, it's more or less a no-brainer. Of course, such things as approach and composition still play a part, but more or less a skull is a skull. Now, when someone is looking for something more involved or possibly trying to communicate an implied or blunt narrative, then different design elements need to be given more or less attention. Either way, when a big piece is involved, I'll normally spend a couple weeks either passively or actively thinking about an



I LIKE TO PAINT EMOTIONS PEOPLE OFTEN MISS, OR WOULD RATHER NOT SEE; SADNESS, PENSIVE SILENCES, THE QUIETUDE OF A PERSON ALONE WITH THEIR THOUGHTS











image. Before long, I've got a general idea what the composition will be and then I will start fleshing it out. In tattooing you often have customers who are very specific about what they would like to see and therefore you are often limited in that regards. But in painting, I'm given quite a bit more leeway as far as the whole product. I think that customers are cued to seeing tattooists as merely a means to their end, whereas they feel a bit less so when dealing with a painter.

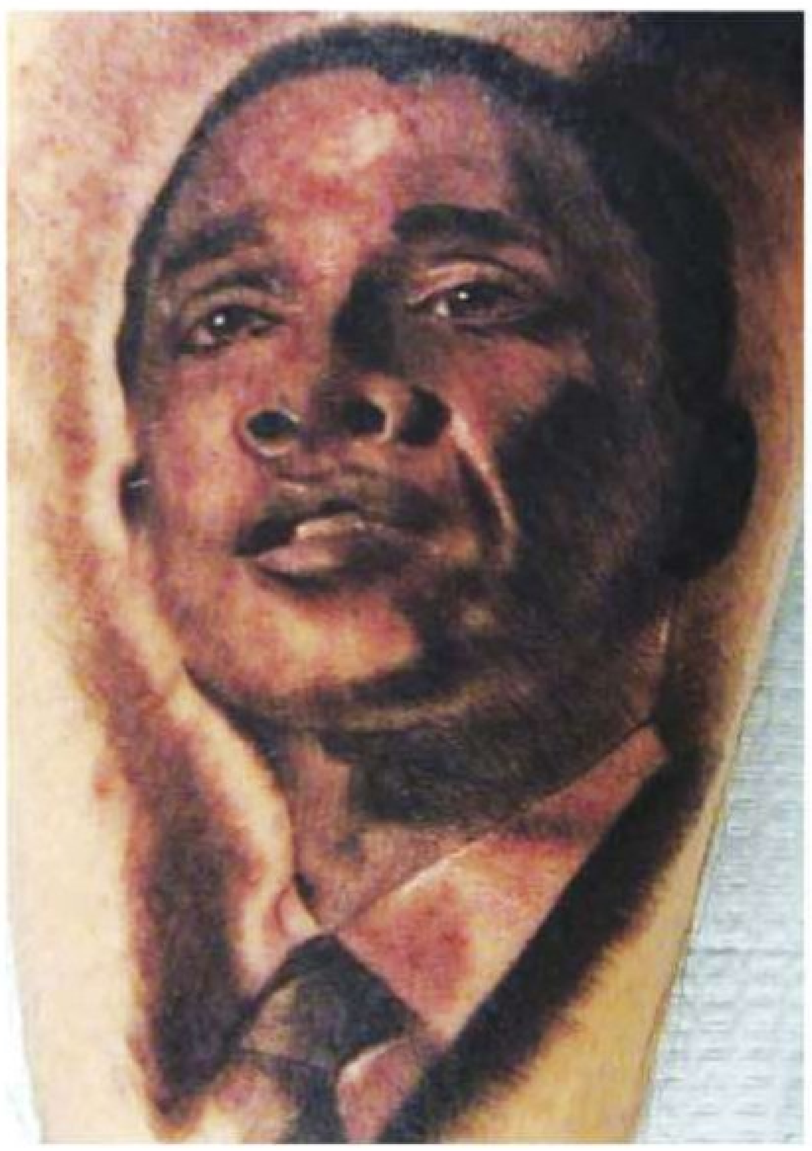
"Currently, and for the past eight years, tattooing has been my day job and painting was merely my hobby. Within the last year or so, I've reached a bit of an equilibrium between the two. In a perfect world, I'd be able to have painting be my bread and butter, allowing me to tattoo exactly what I wanted on people (people who wanted a nice piece of work), rather than being a commercial artist as most tattooists seem to be."

One of Ian's projects, and my favourite, is the Stained Glass Project. The paintings that Ian created for this project are a mix of world religions, mythology and philosophy.

"This project came about from one of my collectors. He was busy having a pavilion built in the city and wanted to know if I would be willing to take on the project. Now, I was only contracted to design the overall look and composition of the panels (six in all) and had no part in the actual fabrication portion of the project. A lot of ideas were tossed around regarding content, and knowing Bill as I did, I figured a spiritual vein would be a good one. I finally settled on the themes of Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Native American, Pagan and finally modern man or science. The panels were painted by hand, and fired, and then set into a leaded glass frame. It proved a good learning experience for me, not only as an artist, but also how to handle

IN A PERFECT WORLD, I'D BE ABLE TO HAVE PAINTING BE MY BREAD AND BUTTER, ALLOWING ME TO TATTOO EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED ON PEOPLE, WHO WANTED A NICE PIECE OF WORK, RATHER THAN BEING A COMMERCIAL ARTIST AS MOST TATTOOISTS SEEM TO BE





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professional contracts. Very rewarding and I hope to see similar work in the future."

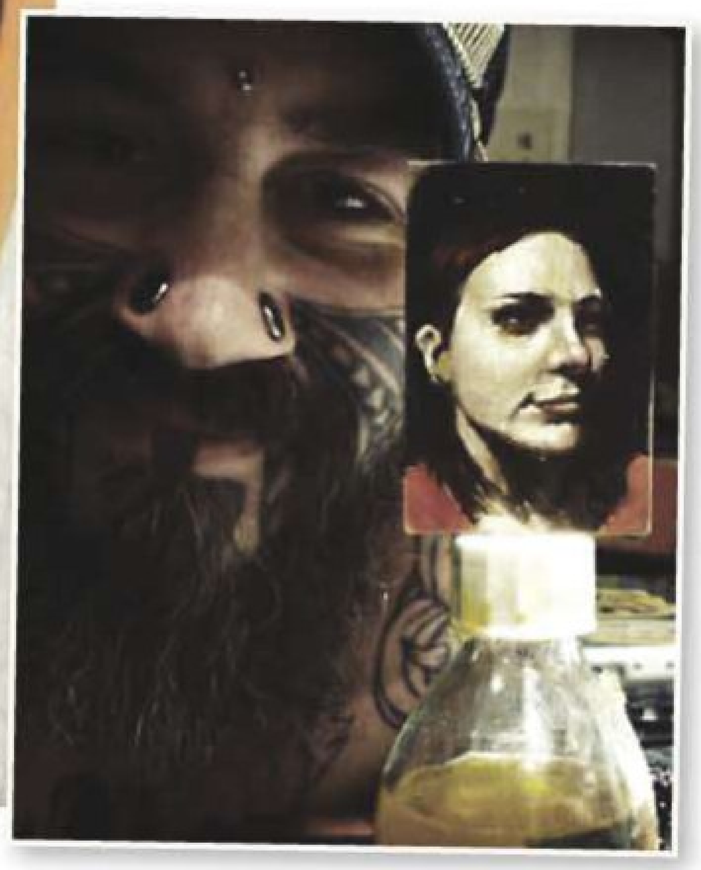
Another aspect of the tattooing world that Ian is passionate about, is the crossover between tattooing and other arts that is really growing by leaps and bounds at the moment.

"We've reached a tipping point, where tattooing has been ingested by mainstream culture. This has allowed many of us to explore avenues outside of tattooing including fine art. I think that we have been able to successfully bridge the gap between, what most would consider commercial art, and being able to be successful and thriving in an art community. Tattooing in general has benefitted so much in recent years with this new direction. Gone are the days of street shops doing only flash pieces, and many artists are now



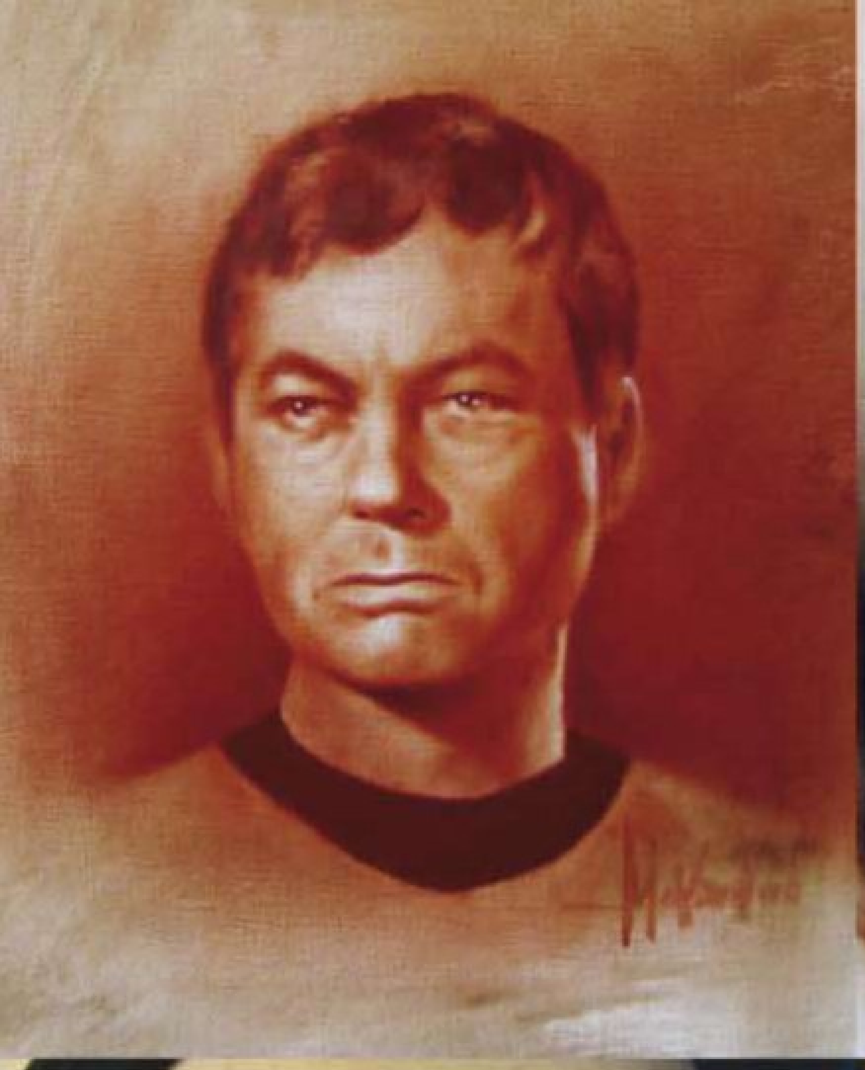


AS THINGS STAND IN THE TATTOO INDUSTRY, WE SEEM TO BE MIRRORING THE AMERICAN ECONOMY, WITH A GROWING PERCENTAGE OF GREAT AND HORRIBLE ARTISTS, AND A MARKED DECREASE IN SIMPLY GOOD ONES. I THINK AS A WHOLE WE NEED TO FIND A BIT MORE COMMUNITY AND LEARN HOW TO BEST PROMOTE ONE ANOTHER



being lauded for their abilities with the brush. Some even eventually leave tattooing behind to pursue careers in fine art. I've got a few solo shows this year, and hopefully will be opening my own gallery mid 2012.

"I'd like to be more active in promoting local artists and my local art community. So many artists have no idea in which ways they can promote their work and become successful, whether it's in tattooing or in fine art. I'm by no means saying I have the formula, but I think it's a lot easier to make headway in both industries when you have people













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GONE ARE THE DAYS OF STREET SHOPS DOING ONLY FLASH PIECES, AND MANY ARTISTS ARE NOW BEING LAUDED FOR THEIR ABILITIES WITH THE BRUSH

who support you and want to see you succeed. Something I've always held close to heart is that the successes of my friends are in some small way, a success for me.

"As things stand in the tattoo industry, we seem to be mirroring the American economy, with a growing percentage of great and horrible artists, and a marked decrease in simply good ones. I think as a whole we need to find a bit more community and learn how to best promote one another. This always leads to great rewards for all! I'd like to thank all those that support me, whether through sitting in my chair, buying a piece of work, going to a show or merely taking the time to let me know I've done or made something they appreciate... and of course, special thanks to my friends here and around the globe for the support and encouragement."

I agree 100 per cent with Ian's words, the tattoo world is evolving, not devolving as many people would like to have us believe. And with people like Ian on board, we can only be heading onwards and upwards to greater things in this world we love so much.

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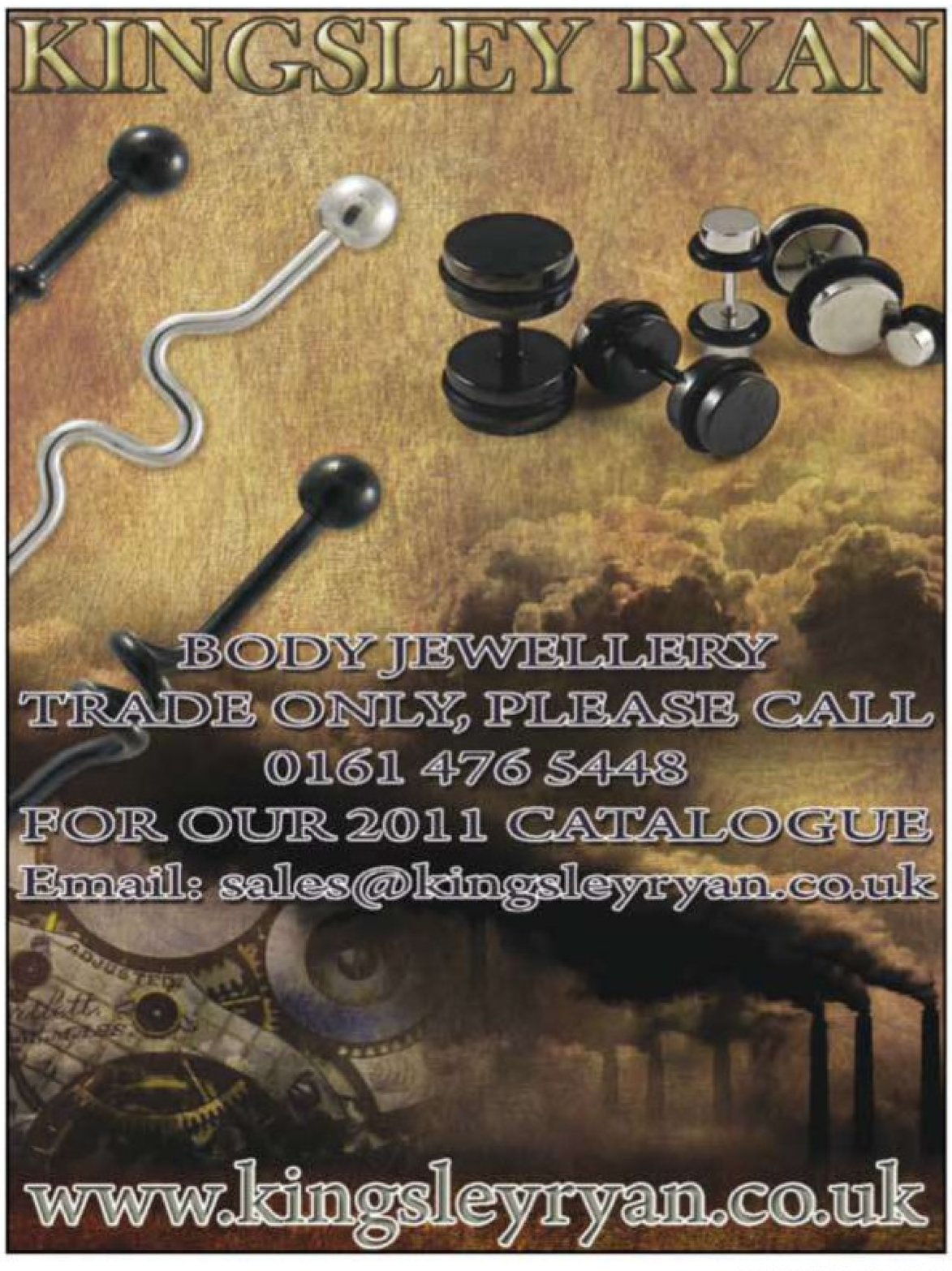
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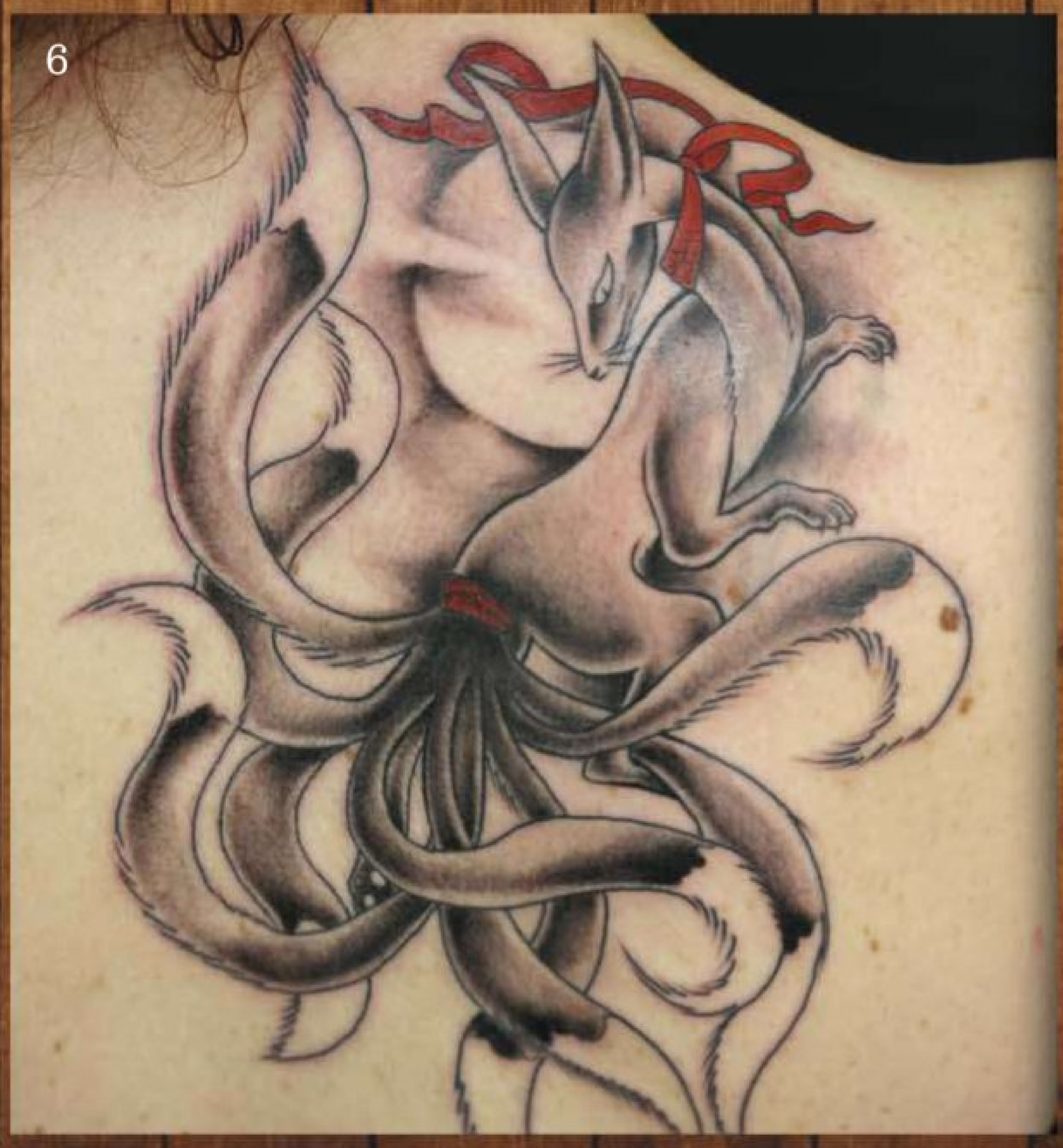
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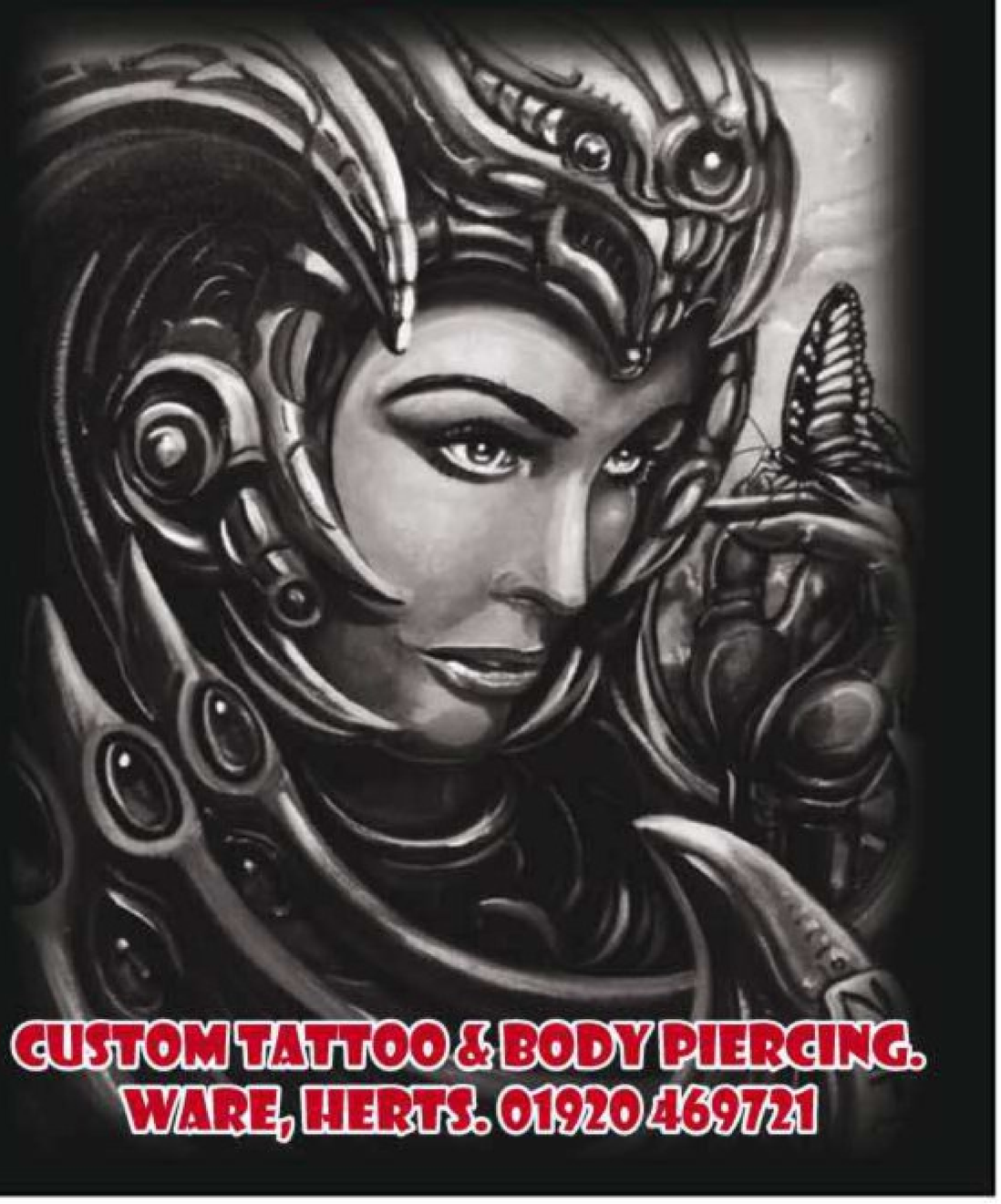
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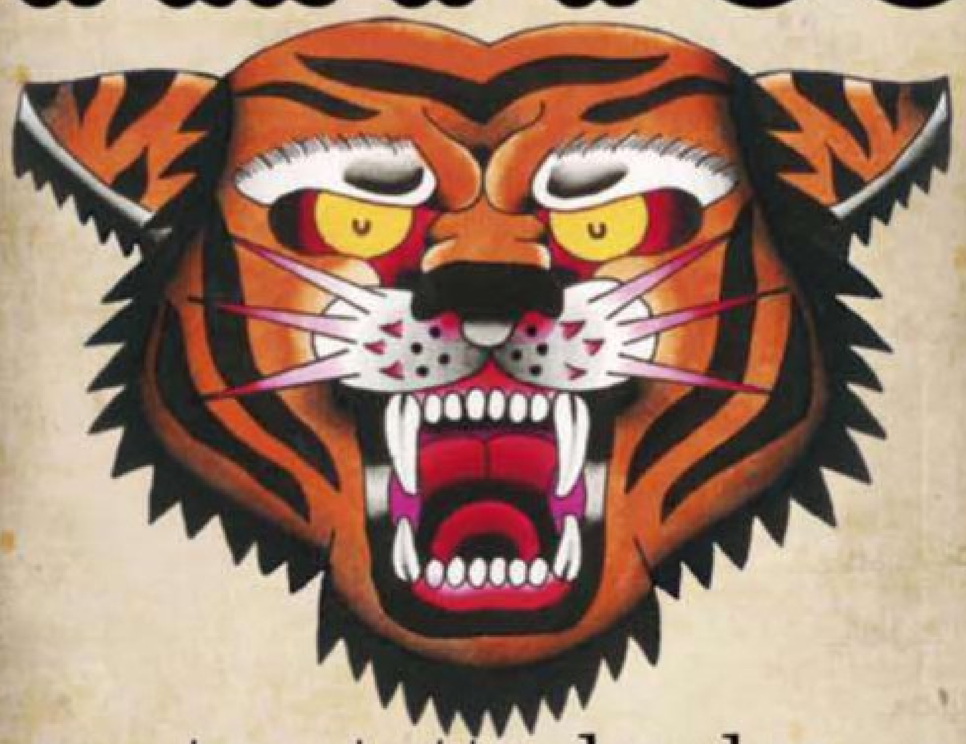
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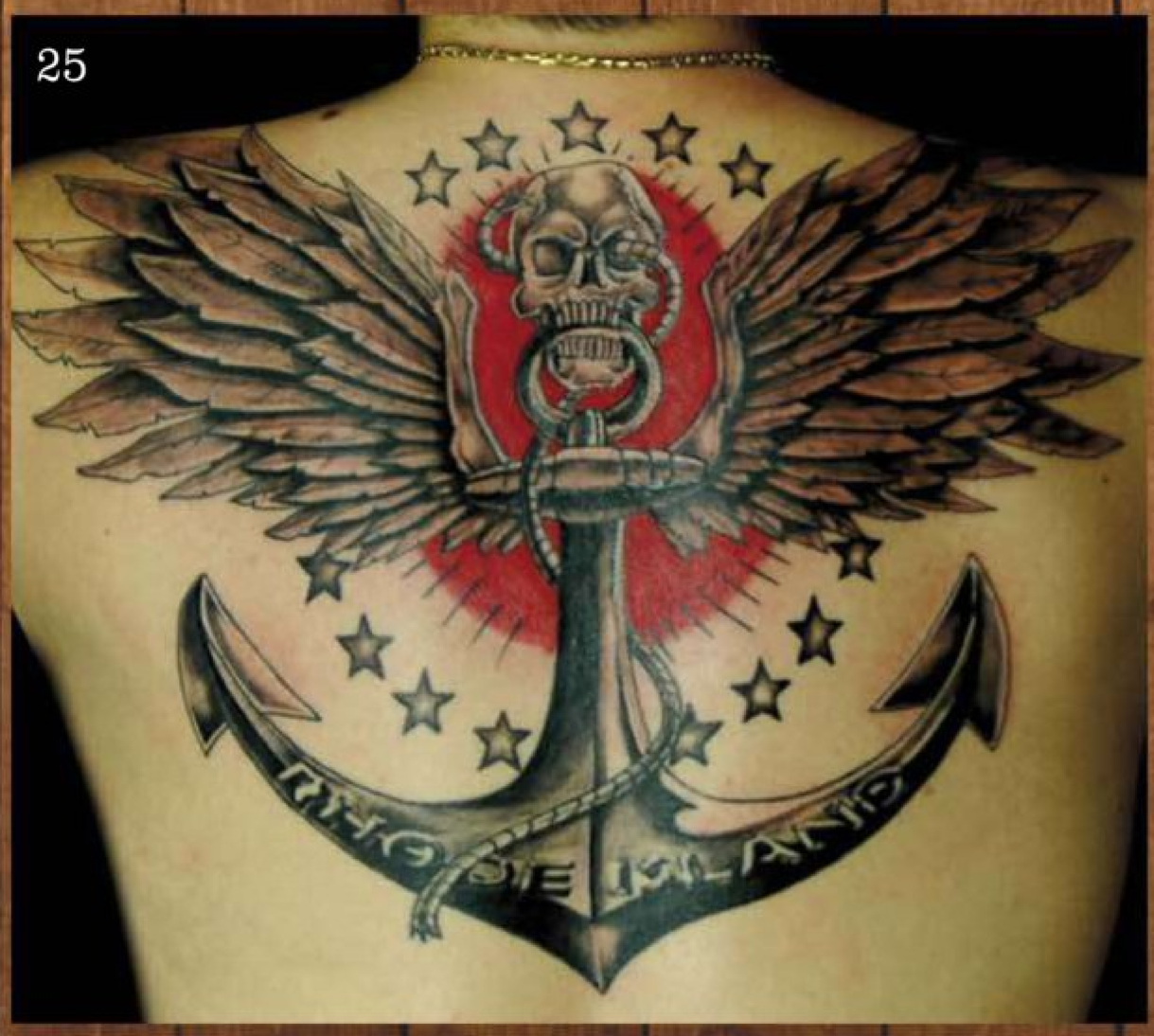
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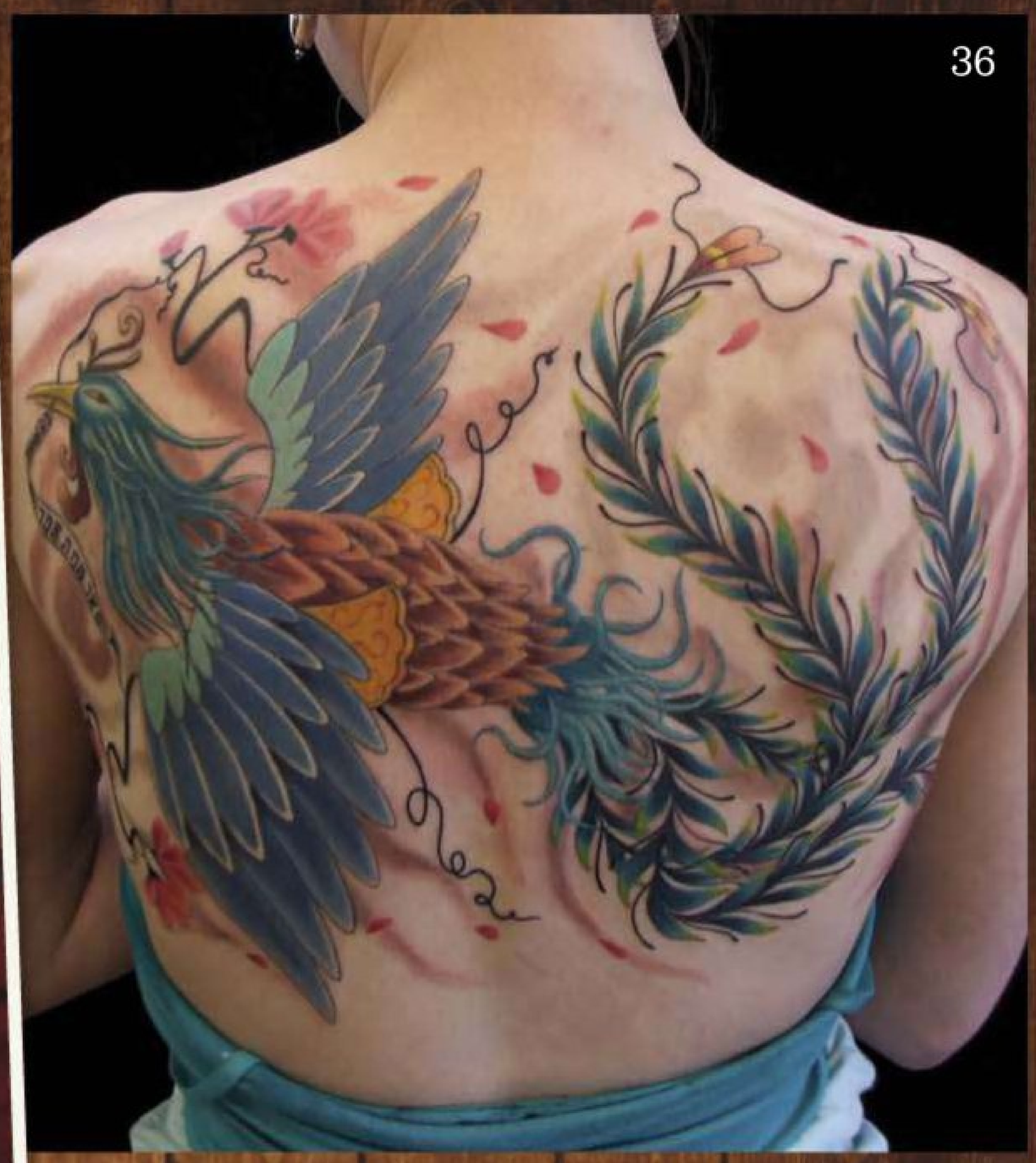

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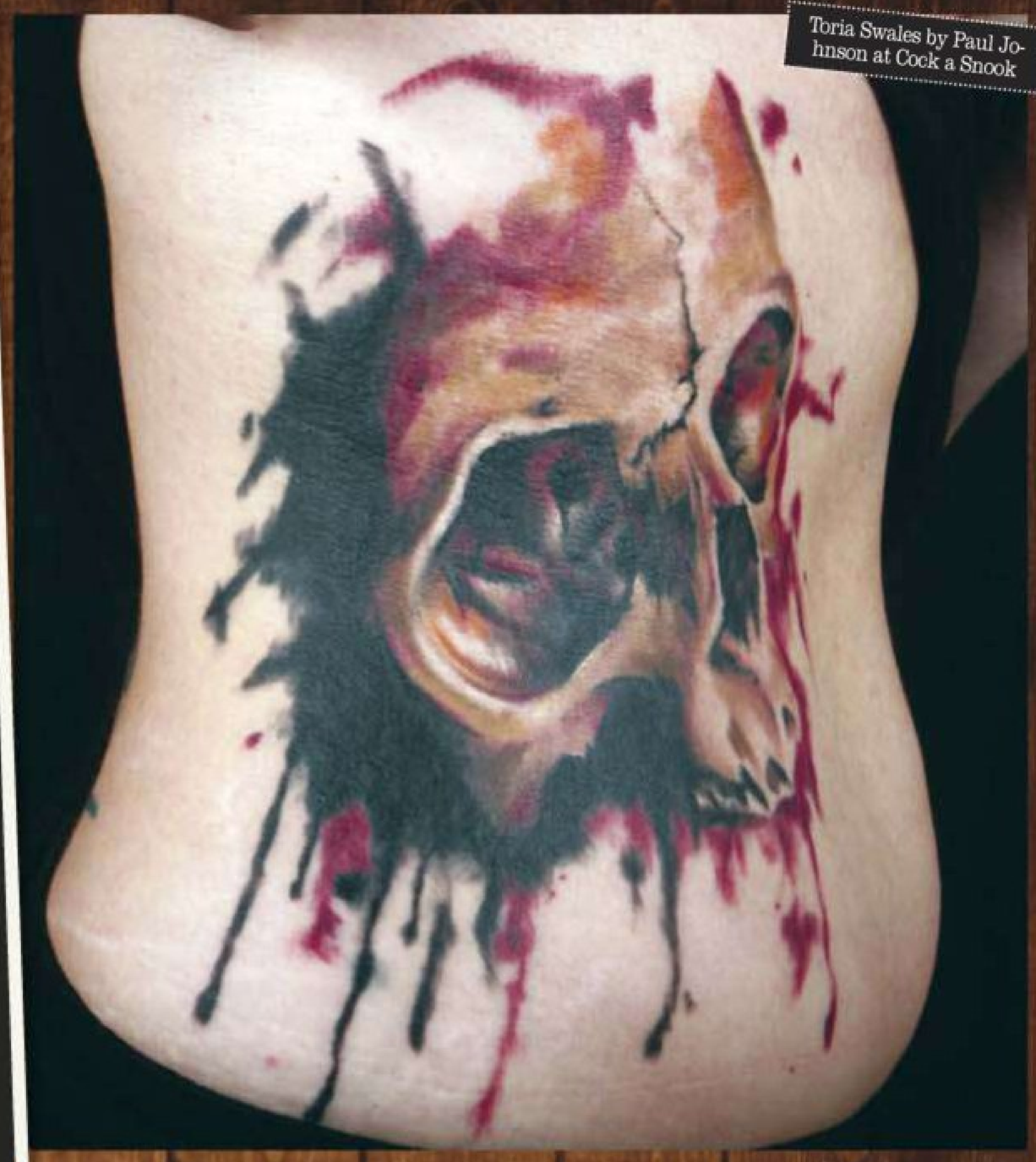
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EVERY DAY IS A

WINDING ROAD

Arriving to meet Takami at Mick Tomo's Ruby Arts studio in York, where he's working in a guest spot, everything is as you'd expect it to be: a busy day in Mick's well-appointed shop, young guy getting his first tattoo necking Coke like it's a potion of invulnerability (his sweat suggests he needs to up the dosage), needles abuzz…



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What you wouldn't expect is that the unassuming chap at the back, inking some Gothic script onto a client's arm, is Takami. He doesn't chat, doesn't look up, just focuses on the job in hand. But given the art he can create, you'd think he'd be cloaked and have sparks crackling from his fingernails.

Instead, he's friendly and thoughtful. When he takes a break and we sit down to talk it's with an interpreter, but even through the language barrier it's clear that I'm talking to quite the tattoo philosopher. So how's he finding his stint in the ancient capital of England? "It's very relaxed to work here, it's very quiet and peaceful. I spent 12 years working in Japan, but I wondered whether I was happy or not, always being in the same place, so I started travelling. It's an adventure for me."

He's been on the road now for the past few years, with occasional stints at his home studio in Yonago, between Osaka and Hiroshima on Japan's Western coast. With the initial wanderlust sated he could have stayed there – he's always fully booked and doesn't need to travel – but his wanderings revealed a deeper desire to improve himself. "I want to become a good artist, and to do that I need to meet many other great artists, and see their work."

Travelling, he says, "helps me discover how good I can be. I can see so many other artists and measure myself against them to see how good I am and decide where I want to go next. Each country is different, the way people's imaginations work is different;



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and the kindness of the people I meet – not just in the tattoo world – inspires my imagination in turn."

Isn't that quite a draining experience, on the soul and more importantly the wallet? The road doesn't come cheap, after all. He's upbeat. "Every experience and country is like a new world for me," he says, "I'm not going just to earn money and I'm not afraid that travelling is expensive – I want the chance to meet people and see how they live, what their world is like. I want to hear their thoughts on everything! It's very fulfilling."

If this sounds like chocolate box philosophy, don't be fooled. It's enthusiasm born of a long, difficult process of self-teaching that brought him to his current ludicrous level of ability. "In Japan tattooing was much stricter than it is in Europe now," he explains, arguing that young artists here neither know how to make their own needles, nor draw to any great standard. "When I started I didn't have any needles, I had to learn to make them myself, I taught myself how to use an autoclave." Back then, he says, it was even hard to get hold of tattoo magazines.

That was then. Now, he says, young artists around the world have tattoo magazines everywhere and easy access to equipment, ordering tattoo machines with just a few mouse clicks. In terms of making working life easier this might not be a bad thing, but the drawback, he believes, is that this convenience comes at a cost. "Young artists don't have the same passion for tattooing any more, they use computers and don't practice their drawing; the more traditional artists still keep that passion, they keep trying to improve their skills. The younger guys don't do that."

He returns to the theme of drawing a lot, I notice. Is it that important? "Before I started tattooing I tried for years, I practised my drawing all the time and people would say to me 'you know, Takami, you're not actually a tattoo artist', but I knew in my heart I was a tattoo artist, and I was going to work to deserve the name of an artist."

There was one slight problem with this. Even as he polished his draughtsmanship (there are some examples around the studio, and yup, they're pretty good), his head had two conflicting desires: to be an artist, while loathing the tattooing style he saw around him. In Takami's youth, irezumi – traditional tattoos hand poked in the old fashioned way – were inextricably linked in his mind to the yakuza – the Japanese mafia.

It's an association that used to keep Westerners with tattoos out of public bath houses, such was the stigma attached to prominent inkwork – not so much of a problem now, but even my own modest tattoos still drew curious glances when I visited the country a few years ago. Back then, it was a sticking point for Takami: "I hated it, I hated the yakuza, but that was all the tattooing I knew."

He cleared the obstacle by radically changing direction after a friend – also

I SPENT 12 YEARS WORKING IN JAPAN, BUT I WONDERED WHETHER I WAS HAPPY OR NOT, ALWAYS BEING IN THE SAME PLACE, SO I STARTED TRAVELLING...

THE FIRST TATTOO

Takami's first attempt at tattooing was a far cry from the wonders he creates now. "I used to play in a hardcore band, and all the guys wanted to get tattoos so my first one was on them – a skull at the top of the leg. I put the stencil on, then tried to copy what I'd seen other artists do. I started tattooing, but then I wiped the tattoo with soap and the entire stencil came off. I thought, what can I do now? So I did it directly, drawing straight onto the skin, and it was so bad..." Here, Takami himself repeats the words of his translator, with a rueful smile. "So bad!" Still, at least they got better...

an experienced artist – came back from the US with a traditional Old School tattoo. "When I saw it, I said 'what's this?!'" Takami exclaims. It was the first non-traditional Japanese ink he'd encountered. "I was surprised. But not long after I saw a tattoo magazine for the first time and was exposed to the different styles, not just traditional Japanese, which is when I decided to learn more about tattooing."

After that, it was Americana all the way – to the degree that Takami would refuse to work in the traditional Japanese style because of its yakuza links. "I didn't want people to confuse my art with theirs," he says, simply.

Whatever style he eventually chose to work in, his education began on his own skin, sitting in the chairs of local studios for hours getting piece after piece inked onto him. It shows: there's so little bare skin left that the designs have licked up his throat and across his face. He's having to get some of the old work lasered off now to make room for more art. "I taught myself everything," he says of his 'apprenticeship'. "I would keep getting tattoos to see how the artists worked, just to gradually understand a little bit more about the process. Little by little people started to know my name and would invite me to watch and learn."

When it was his turn to pick up the needle he turned to the American style, with the aid of some Old School flash that arrived via mail order after a long wait. "When it came, I was so happy I thought my head would explode! Every day I was drawing, to practice," he grins.

By now you'll probably have noticed that the artwork gracing these pages is a lot of things, but one thing it definitely isn't, is Americana. So what happened? "I don't do traditional American style tattoos any more," he says. "When I used to do that style, artists who worked in it would come up to me and say 'why are you doing that style? You're Japanese, why aren't you doing traditional Japanese style?'"

It was a turning point. "I started to think about what they said, and as I started to learn more about Japanese tattoos I realised it was all about respect. Americans are probably the best at tattooing in the Old School style. It's the same as tribal; I won't do tribal tattoos because the individual symbols have very specific meanings, and the traditional tribal tattoo artists – in Samoa, for example – are the best at understanding them and doing that kind of work."

Like all things to do with tattooing, Takami takes this belief seriously. "If people come to me at conventions and ask me for tribal work, I'll send them to any traditional tribal artists working there. Tradition is very important to

EVERY TATTOO SYMBOL MIGHT HAVE HUNDREDS OF YEARS OF HISTORY BEHIND IT, AND YOU DON'T WANT SOMEONE TATTOOING THOSE SYMBOLS WHO DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY MEAN, WHAT THEIR HERITAGE IS

GANGSTER CHIC

Tattooing and criminality have a complex history in Japan: in the eighth century BCE tattooing was a punishment, used to shame lawbreakers. Later it became the calling card of yakuza gangsters, whose elaborate bodysuits showed their devotion to the cause, and also their fortitude. The link between tattooing and mafia activities drove the authorities to make it illegal, but a happy loophole made it fine for Japanese artists to tattoo foreigners (including, apparently, the Duke of York – later King George V), which helped spread Japanese traditional inkwork around the world. Nonetheless, those sneaky gangsters would still indulge in clandestine inking sessions, hence the strong cultural association between crime and tattooing in Japan; luckily, like all bad ink, it's now fading away.



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YOUNG ARTISTS DON'T HAVE THE SAME PASSION FOR TATTOOING ANY MORE, THEY USE COMPUTERS AND DON'T PRACTICE THEIR DRAWING; THE MORE TRADITIONAL ARTISTS STILL KEEP THAT PASSION, THEY KEEP TRYING TO IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS. THE YOUNGER GUYS DON'T DO THAT

me. Every tattoo symbol might have hundreds of years of history behind it, and you don't want someone tattooing those symbols who doesn't understand what they mean, what their heritage is."

So having started with an aversion to traditional Japanese tattoos, he's come full circle and now devotes his time to knowing and understanding the different layers of meaning they can contain. "The symbolism of traditional Japanese tattooing is very important, and I have to know it before I can create a tattoo," he explains. "If someone wants a dragon tattoo, I know what the dragon means and what it signifies. Or if customers want a red or a blue background, I'll know that's impossible because in Japanese tattooing the stories always take place at night, so the background should always be black." He claims he won't do a tattoo if the customer won't accommodate a black background, and looking through his portfolio, it's hard to find an exception





IT'S EASY TO STRESS AND WASTE YOUR TIME FRETTING OVER SMALL THINGS, BUT WHEN I'M TATTOOING I CAN BE FOCUSED. FOR ME, TATTOOING IS ART, THEY'RE ONE AND THE SAME. AND I DON'T LET ANYTHING GET IN THE WAY OF THAT, I DON'T LET ANYTHING SPOIL MY FOCUS WHEN I WORK

to the rule – if you look closely enough, that black is indeed always lurking behind everything.

Rather than simply being intransigent, this is all about giving his work meaning. "Different backgrounds and positions change the meaning of a tattoo, so it's good to take advice," he says. "Then the customer can be aware of what their tattoos mean, rather than it just being about fashion."

Reflecting on this for a moment, he softens his stance a little. "Each person has their own personality. They can get a tattoo because it looks cool, or because it has a personal meaning to them – I can buy a book because I like the cover, or because I'm interested in what it says, and it's the same for tattoos." And if he's strict with his clients, he's certainly more flexible about his own ink, which is mainly created by artist friends around the world: "I just give them a body part and let them do what they want!"

If you go to see Takami for a tattoo, that's what he'd like from you as well, please. "I like it if someone comes to me with an idea and trusts me to create something for them. If they say they want a dragon, I'll draw one that fits within the lines of their body. They give me the general idea, then I'll build the design and incorporate backgrounds, and other motifs; I like to have a bit of freedom."

Just like he enjoys the freedom of being a wandering artist, perhaps. It's certainly kept his passion for his work alive: "I love tattooing because I meet a lot of people, and because all of my days are dedicated to art. Even when I get home at night, I'm still drawing and creating tattoos. It's easy to stress and waste your time fretting over small things, but when I'm tattooing I can be focused. For me, tattooing is art, they're one and the same. And I don't let anything get in the way of that, I don't let anything spoil my focus when I work."

Well, that explains the concentration when I arrived. So what's next for this driven, thoughtful, surprising artist? Geographically, it's India. And professionally? "I want to take my art as far as I can. I'll never stop, I want to improve forever; maybe in the last few minutes of my life I'll find the answers to my questions about tattooing and art." A pause. "Maybe I'll learn just that little bit more."

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Grindhouse a Go Go

Mike Pecci is a man with an eye for the chainsaw wielding ladies. Knowing him as I do now, that's probably a little basic, as he has a pretty mean eye for anything that will make a great photograph – and if it's tattooed, so much the better. With his latest project taking shape, what better time could there be to clash heads with this creative powerhouse?

I kind of feel like somebody else might have felt a long time ago when they were shown *My Best Friend's Birthday* – the little known movie that Tarantino made before he went on to unleash *Reservoir Dogs*. The feeling pretty much comes down to something like 'I'm in the presence of something special here, something on the edge of breaking through…'

Which is hardly surprising given the subject matter Mike Pecci chooses to play with really. Watching his highly stylised work and – especially at this stage of his career – being aware of how much he takes care of all the other 'little things', you can see something special really begin to happen.

Are great film-makers born with a silver spoon, or are they made out of solid hard graft? Should you go to college or should you get the hell on with it?

"Growing up I had all sorts of jobs ranging from a baker to airplane mechanic. I used to consistently work in music stores and fell in love with music and how it affected people, so I decided to go to school for radio. I learned quickly that it was a shitty job with no room for creativity so I randomly took a film studies class. It blew my mind.

"Suddenly I was aware of the camera. Aware that someone had to design everything on that screen. I raced to see my class councilor and told him to switch my major and put a camera in my hands. He explained that I still needed to take all of the other college required courses first, and in a year or two I could finally start using a camera.

"I did the math and realised how in debt I was gonna be while taking courses that didn't suit me, so I told the school to shove it, went and got a job at a TV station, saved up cash, and took an intense film course in NYC. I learned how to produce films, shot about four shorts, and directed one. I came back to Boston, started my first company and went to work and I've been doing it ever since."

> WHEN I PHOTOGRAPH WOMEN WITH SLEEVES AND PROCESS THEM THROUGH PHOTOSHOP THE IMAGE FEELS A LOT LIKE THOSE COMIC BOOK SKETCHES. RANDOM BITS OF VIBRANT COLOR, SHADING THAT EMERGES FROM SHADOW...

And this is the kind of story that makes a mans heart sing. 'Shock-tactics' aside, Mike makes movies about people with character and depth. Always aware of the multitude of sides a human psyche has, he seems to pull these things

Sion Smith Mike Pecci. Styling: Nicole Fisher

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Granny Suicide

out of nowhere to illustrate his movies – or am I reading too much into it? Is it more of a gut-reaction?

"I set out to make the sort of stuff I would want to watch. Luckily I have a taste that aligns with the audience – thank God. I like to tell stories about the dark side of people. Everyone has done something that falls outside of the public norm. I love sitting down and drinking with someone for the first time and cutting through all that bullshit chatter about what's your favorite music, blah, blah, blah, and get to the real life stories. You were arrested for what? You have slept with a prostitute, really? You ate your kids candy bar and blamed it on the dog?! These stories add character and give you something to walk away with.

"I also love genre films; noir, cop movies, western heroes. The trick is to take those character stories and put them in a genre that you want to play with. You can expect to see a lot of this from me as I jump into longer formats."

MUSIC VIDEOS CAN BE A LOT OF FUN. THEY ALLOW US TO TEST OUT TECHNIQUES AND SOMETIMES TELL SHORT STORIES THAT REACH A HUGE AUDIENCE

Mike originally got himself on my radar when I saw some of the 'tattooed' stills from his latest Grindhouse short film compilation. Is this inked-up inclusion a calculated move?

"Well, I became fascinated with tattooed women when I first visited the Suicide Girls website years ago. Growing up, I was obsessed with comic books, and trained to be a comic book artist for a while. I wanted to create these beautiful women I fell in love with as a child. I used to spend hours just studying sketch lines, poses, and the posture of these characters.

"When I photograph women with sleeves and process them through photoshop the image feels a lot like those comic book sketches. Random bits of vibrant colour, shading that emerges from shadow. I feel like I'm bringing these women from my fantasies to life. I hope that doesn't sound too creepy! So since I had started doing photo sets for SG, it was a simple transition to bring those girls into my films."


Corlen Kruger

During 2010/2009, Mike shot a lot of music video too. Is that a conscious decision to push the business in other directions?

"At one point in my career, I crossed paths with director and musician Ian McFarland. He was a big fan of my photography and I was impressed with the videos he had directed. We hit it off immediately. We are both firm believers in the "do it yourself" mentality and he asked if I would shoot some music videos that he would be directing. Two videos later we realized that we were co-directing so we formed McFarland & Pecci and tackled the music world.

"Music videos can be a lot of fun. They allow us to test out techniques and sometimes tell short stories that reach a huge audience. For the next year or so we were just busting our asses with it here in Boston shooting for bands that Ian knew from the road and we somehow got Meshuggah and Fear Factory on board! Both those videos ended up on Headbangers Ball's top 25 videos of the year list for 2009 and 2010. Then the agents started calling and so did the bigger acts...

"Ozzy, Devo, The Deftones, we have been writing treatments now for some of our favorite acts ever since. The problem with music videos is that the death of the music industry (as we knew it) is putting a cap on what we can do creatively because of budgets and business politics. So we are not expecting much from it these days. We find ourselves working for acts we love or friends now because it's just a lot more fun. McFarland & Pecci is also changing. The brand is now becoming a creative house where we develop films, series, and content. Both of us are now repped as individual directors and on certain projects, we team up! The goal is to be creating edgy and beautiful content through our brand."

To be frank, as we all sit here in 2011, this is how the future is shaping up for all of us. You can't simply be a specialist in one area anymore and expect somebody to come along with a ton of cash and float you for the rest of your life. It doesn't work like that anymore. To succeed you need to use every medium at your disposal.



THE WEB HAS MADE MY CAREER. I STARTED DOING PHOTO SHOOTS FOR SUICIDE GIRLS AND MY PHOTOGRAPHY REACHED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE ON EACH RELEASE. I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PROMOTE MY FILMS AND SELL DIRECTLY TO MY FANS ALL OVER THE WORLD.

Emily Stanely

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"Absolutely. The web has made my career. I started doing photo shoots for Suicide Girls and my photography reached thousands of people on each release. I have been able to promote my films and sell directly to my fans all over the world. Our music video for Meshuggah has over seven million hits on YouTube and I now have a solid fan-base because of the internet. That fan-base has helped start my conversations with some of the 'big guns'. It's awesome!

"I strongly believe in self promotion. People don't know what you are doing until you tell them. If I sat around waiting for you to call me, it would never have happened. Having direct contact with editors is key, creating those relationships, and staying loyal is big for me. You need to do what it takes. There's a period early on in my career when it looked as though I wasn't even on the planet. This is kind of between 2001 and 2005. What I was actually doing was four years of heavy experimentation. I was shooting and publishing photos, I was shooting my short films Flight and The Subway Stalker. I suddenly had a career as a cinematographer and found myself working on documentaries, and other friends' shorts. It was a great learning period for me. I learned a lot of the skills that I fall back on during that time."

I see a lot of fine pop-culture references in Mike's films pulling in everything from Hitchcock to Sin City. do these influences seep into your work or they are persistently used because they work and provide a peg on which to hang the proverbial hat?

"In that film course I did, we made silent black and white movies. I was obsessed with Hitchcock's suspense and spent a lot of time studying it, and of course, comics influence my work. When you look at my frames and look at the artwork of Jim Lee, well it makes a lot of sense. I like to follow directors. Fincher, Scott, Peckinpah, Spielberg, and other masters of the visual medium. They inspire me constantly with their camera moves, music choices, and characters. I love watching films, and I love watching an audience watch a film. It's a beautiful personal moment that you get to have in public when you are in a theatre. It's a lot of fun to see people reacting at the same time."

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Talking of self promotion and people doing things for themselves and making it happen regardless of circumstances, let's take a look at some of the cover art for Grindhouse Shorts.

"I hunted each of them down specifically. I have been a member of deviantart.com for about nine years now. The coolest part of that site is that it gives you direct access to the artist. I also found a lot of my favorite comics artists on there and talk with them often.

"But for the covers, what happened was that I wrote notes to all of the illustrators I loved and asked them to do covers for me. Yasmine I have worked with before. She did a cover for my original Cold Hard Cash release. I love the way she draws and, she has this way of creating action and attitude that gets me excited! I saw CK's movie poster work and his work with the old horror film vibe and thought he would be perfect! I love illustrated posters and variant covers. I think I am the eternal comic book kid!"

If you're in the mood for following up on this part of the story, you can read more about the covers here at mikepecci.com/news/?p=122. So what's next for somebody who has certainly put in the hours and paid his dues? Is there a big plan – a plan to step it up a gear and get more into the mainstream?

"I've been doing my thing now for over ten years. I have been learning how to shoot, how to edit, and how to tell a story. That takes time and practice. You read these stories about the overnight success. It's bullshit. It seems like they are overnight because they aren't being sold to the masses yet. I just keep pushing forward, aiming for bigger and better projects. I have two feature scripts ready to go, one hopefully goes into production this spring.

"I am excited to make the jump into the long format. I know I have the skills needed at this point and I'm

> I WAS OBSESSED WITH HITCHCOCK'S SUSPENSE AND SPENT A LOT OF TIME STUDYING IT, AND OF COURSE, COMICS INFLUENCE MY WORK. WHEN YOU LOOK AT MY FRAMES AND LOOK AT THE ARTWORK OF JIM LEE, WELL IT MAKES A LOT OF SENSE. I LIKE TO FOLLOW DIRECTORS





Rydell Suicide

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I HOPE SKIN DEEP READERS ARE REALLY INTERESTED IN CHECKING OUT MY MOVIES. EVERYTHING CAN BE FOUND BY HITTING THE MERCH LINK ONLINE



Emily Stanely

interested in all the shit I will learn doing it at a bigger scale. There are all sorts of details that most people don't think about. Politics, mastering the art of delegation and staying creative under stress (Tell me about it. Ed.). That stuff drives me, and that drive will put me in the bigger playing field. Very soon actually.

"I hope Skin Deep readers are really interested in checking out my movies. You can check out my website www.mikepecci.com for links to my short films and to check out my photography. I've created this new technique called 'Living Images'; they are photographs that are alive. Really cutting edge stuff.

"You can buy a Grindhouse DVD here: mikepecci.com/news/?page_id=8. I ship them out of my office and often sign them for people who contact me on Facebook or twitter. We are also selling hoodies that have the beautiful art from Yasmine plastered all over them. High quality brand, shit too that I would want to wear. Alternatively, you can check out my work with Ian and our music videos at mcfarlandandpecci.com. Be on the lookout for news about that feature coming soon. It's going to be awesome and absolutely brutal to watch. Oh and yes there is a strong female lead!

"Finally, write to me, I love hearing from fans. Use the internet to get in touch. I do it!"

You heard the man...

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One of the things that I love most about visiting studios and meeting tattooists is hearing how they got into the world of tattooing. For some reason, I always approach the subject thinking I have heard it all before and then I meet a new artist and a whole new story comes out. And I wasn't to be disappointed when I headed over to Morley, North Yorkshire, to catch up with Matt Hart, the owner of Inspirations Tattoo Studios

Matt has been tattooing for ten years and has two successful studios under his belt, which doesn't sound like stand-out stuff, until you consider his age that is. Matt, for all his success so far, has only just hit 30. Yup, that's right; ten years experience, two studios with four amazingly talented artists working them and Matt is a relative youngster. So how does someone with not many academic qualifications and a short lived career in car insurance sales make all this magic happen? Well, bizarrely enough, it starts with Matt's father, who was a piercer.

"I have been tattooing since I was about 18, as soon as I left school really. I wasn't the most academic type and I didn't really enjoy school. The only thing that I did enjoy was art. It was the only thing I excelled in, so I couldn't wait to leave. When I finally left, all my friends had apprenticeships and were earning

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WHEN I FIRST SET THIS SHOP UP IN 1999, THERE WAS PROBABLY ONLY SIX STUDIOS IN THE WHOLE OF LEEDS, WHEREAS NOW THERE ARE HUNDREDS!

money and enjoying themselves. Luckily, one of my friends got me a job in an insurance company. Well I say luckily... at the time it felt quite lucky, but when I think back it wasn't! So I was straight out of school selling car insurance and I didn't really have many qualifications. My mother used to do markets and stuff selling fashion jewellery, watches and bits of body jewellery; I used to work at the markets when I was younger. Then she started working at a shop in Morley selling the same stuff while she was also doing ear piercing with a gun; this was while my Dad was a police officer. Then he was in quite a bad accident while working one day and ended up retiring quite early due to his injuries. My Mum had quite a few people coming in and asking for body piercings and initially she was going to go on a course to do it, but my Dad ended up doing it instead, as something to do now that he was retired from the force. So they had that piercing studio for a few years. He still does it, just around the corner from the studio.

"My Dad knew a tattoo artist and when I left the insurance company he introduced us. I was always into art and I knew it was something

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creative I wanted to do, but I wasn't really sure what and I had never really thought of tattooing as a profession. You know, back then, it was something totally different to what it is now. It wasn't as mainstream as it is now and most of the studios were back street studios. When I first set this shop up in 1999, there was probably only six studios in the whole of Leeds, whereas now there are hundreds!

"So I started doing this apprenticeship by learning to solder needles, putting needle groups together and working with machines. I also did a few tattoos. Then a shop came up in Morley and I ended up leaving there and coming here straight off the back of about four weeks of training. By the way, I don't recommend anyone do this as I thought I could tattoo until I moved. It is such a long hard road when you are teaching yourself, especially as you pick up a lot of bad habits along the way which are then really hard to get rid of."

So an unconventional start to say the least, but one that saw Matt learning the craft from the bottom up. A case of both teacher and student, but with this knowledge behind him, when it came to take on an apprentice or two, was their training going to move along the same path?

"The way I used to learn was to look in magazines at the artist's work. I would dissect their work and try to bring *their* techniques into my work. I progressed and got technically better at tattooing. What I wanted to concentrate on first, was getting good at doing quality tattoos, and then I concentrated on the art side of things. Whereas all the apprentices I have had, they need to be skilled artists before I even train them now. I did it the other way round, which I wouldn't recommend unless you want to spend years and years being crap.

"When Neil came along, he had done an art degree, so we bounced off of each other and while I was teaching him the technical side, he progressed me on the art side. Craig had worked with me as a Saturday lad for a few years and I was going to

THE WAY I USED TO LEARN WAS TO LOOK IN MAGAZINES AT THE ARTIST'S WORK. I WOULD DISSECT THEIR WORK AND TRY TO BRING THEIR TECHNIQUES INTO MY WORK. I PROGRESSED AND GOT TECHNICALLY BETTER AT TATTOOING



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NEIL DRANSFIELD



NEIL DRANFIELD
I started tattooing full time about two and a half years ago after being in the industry five years. I had a pretty traditional apprenticeship that I was really not enjoying at all so I left there thinking tattooing maybe wasn't for me. My girlfriend kept pushing me to pursue what I had already started until I found Matt at Inspirations. He helped me loads and finally took me on as his apprentice where I worked with him up until we opened the Hyde Park shop in February of last year. I thank him and my partner for where I am now, without them I wouldn't be tattooing
I now work full time from our Hyde Park shop in Leeds. I spend pretty much every day either drawing, or tattooing something pretty cool, which I feel very lucky and privileged to be doing. I sort of tattoo how I draw, so I can only hope people like what they see in my artwork. I take inspiration from lots of things I like such as antique/old looking things, comics and video games (I'm just a geek at heart!) I'm starting to take an interest in religious art and religious history so that's influencing my work a bit at the moment too.
Big thanks to god, my parents, girlfriend, everyone at Inspirations, Tiny Miss Becca at Jayne Doe (thanks so much for the guest spots), Scott and Tom at Odd Fellows (Leeds) - oh and my amazing bulldog Evie with her saggy face.











train him up first, but he had a young child, he was only young himself and he needed a job where he could earn some decent money straight away. So he ended up going away and working for a design company. So Neil was the first apprentice really. Neil had done an initial apprenticeship at another shop and it hadn't turned

IT IS SUCH A LONG HARD ROAD WHEN YOU ARE TEACHING YOURSELF, ESPECIALLY AS YOU PICK UP A LOT OF BAD HABITS ALONG THE WAY WHICH ARE THEN REALLY HARD TO GET RID OF

out too well. He came in one day with his portfolio and I looked at it and thought, this guy's got some talent.

"I had been on my own for six or seven years before Neil joined the gang. I had the odd little apprentice that didn't work out, you know the rock 'n' roll type who was in it for the wrong reasons. Craig and Neil will tell you, they had to go through a hard apprenticeship. Craig was actually the last person I trained, but he has been with me the longest. I used to lock him in the back room and beat on him! And though I think it's really important to do it like that (*not the beating or the locking in cupboards – Ed*), I wouldn't change how I learnt, because I learnt a lot really quickly, under pressure and in at the deep end. And I learnt a lot that probably new apprentices don't nowadays, like making needles and things like that, which they don't really do anymore because you can

SNEAKY MITCH ALLENDEN



MITCH ALLENDEN
I'm the newest arrival at Inspirations. I started around three months ago and this was my first step into full time tattooing. Before working at this studio, I was an apprentice and worked part time within Lee Hart's studio, Ink Perfection in Gainsborough. I worked there whilst doing a degree in illustration at Lincoln University, which I hated. I don't have a lot to say so I thought I'd include a list of things I like. I enjoy long walks in the park, dressing like a unicorn and scaring foxes. I like wizards, badgers, sharks, wood grain, black metal, 80's music, old shoes, new shoes, boxes, pencils, beards and whisky. Thanks to everyone who has let me tattoo them, except the people who couldn't sit still.

YOU USED TO COME IN EARLY MONDAY MORNING AND MAKE ALL YOUR NEEDLES FOR THE REST OF THE WEEK. AND THAT'S AN OLD SKILL THAT IS GOING TO DISAPPEAR







get needles for dirt cheap. When I was starting out, actual pre-made needles were really expensive, so you made your own because they were cheaper to make. You used to come in early Monday morning and make all your needles for the rest of the week. And that's an old skill that is going to disappear. I can tune machines pretty well now because when I used to have no one in, I would take my machines apart and put them back together just to see how they worked."

Unable to sit back and relax once one studio was up and running successfully, Matt decided a new challenge was needed. A new apprentice or two? Not Matt, he was setting his sights on something bigger.

"It was just Neil and I on our own for a few years and I thought I needed a new challenge, something new to do really. A shop became available in Hyde Park; it was quite a busy shop in a student area and I thought it would be a good opportunity to expand a little bit. We set it up and initially Neil was going to work there on his own. At the time, Rich used to come in and get tattooed quite a lot while he was working at another studio in Bradford that wasn't really going anywhere fast. He was pestering us for ages about an apprenticeship; he was a real nice guy and I knew we would all get on well together. He was also real modest and a hard worker, he just needed a bit of honing really and I knew it wouldn't take long to iron out once we started working together. So we trained him up here at Morley while Neil was over at Hyde Park.

"All this time, I had my eye on Mitch. Craig knew the tattooist that Mitch was apprenticing for, Lee Hart. Because he was working under Lee, we never really took it further. Then it turned out he finishing university and moving up to Manchester to be with his girlfriend and he was looking for a studio up north, so I messaged him asking him if he fancied coming down and working for us. And that was about June 2011. My long term plans, when I have some money behind me, would be to buy one big shop and have us all

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working out of it."

Two studios on the go, five artists turning out outstanding work and suddenly ten years have flown by. Times change and so do the people working in tattooing, and more importantly, customers have changed their views on tattooing.

"Only when the TV shows started did people become really aware that you could get what you want. Obviously there were magazines, but they were only really for the hard-core tattoo type people. The general public, they thought what you did was go to the studio, go through the books and pick a piece you liked. They weren't really educated in custom and it was hard to change them. But now it is definitely a lot easier to talk them into getting a custom piece. And it still confuses people sometimes when they come in and there are no flash racks. We tell them, 'look, everything is drawn up; you come in with an idea and we will draw something up and then you've got a unique piece designed for you'. Don't get me wrong, we still do walk-ins if we have the time. If someone wants a smallish piece we can draw it up there and then. But most of our work is appointment.

"Also, we all specialise in different areas, we each have our own styles. Though saying that, we do cover all styles individually because to be honest it would get quite boring doing the same thing over and over every day. We can cater for everyone and if say, one of the guys doesn't think he can do a piece justice, we'll pass him over. And I think it has helped me being a flash artist because you become a bit of an all-rounder.

RICH WELLS

I started tattooing at Inspirations just under two years ago. I worked at a smaller studio beforehand for a short while, but I'd say my professional career started when I arrived at Inspirations. Tattooing is something I became interested in when I was a teenager, it went hand in hand with the music and art I was into at the time and it's sort of consumed my life ever since. It's great working alongside such talented artists at Inspirations; they are a great set of guys, down to earth and none of that pretentious shit. I think it brings you on so much more as a tattooist when you can work off of others around you and bounce ideas off one another. My preferred style is traditional, I love the simplicity and boldness to it and the history it holds with it. But working in a street shop I deal with a lot of walk-ins too so I try not to pigeon hole myself too much. I'm still new to the game but I'm grateful for everything that tattooing has given me so far. Special thanks to my mates who are sporting my not so cracking first attempts. I'll share the millions I make from tattooing with them, just waiting for Jeremy Kyle to run its course then were gonna hit the big screen.



THE GENERAL PUBLIC THOUGHT WHAT YOU DID WAS GO TO THE STUDIO, GO THROUGH THE BOOKS AND PICK A PIECE YOU LIKED. THEY WEREN'T REALLY EDUCATED IN CUSTOM AND IT WAS HARD TO CHANGE THEM







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With doing different flash, you are doing different styles all the time. And you learn different techniques from different styles and you can put all of those in your custom work. Blend them all together and find something new.

"I started by doing flash, that's how I learnt really. But from the start, I knew that I didn't want to be copying other people's work. I was enjoying it at the time and I was thinking, 'yeah this is great', but I quickly got to the point where I wanted to do my own stuff. I wanted to design stuff myself. Then when I had made that decision, it was hard to make the transition from going from flash to custom work, because I had done it for so long and all my customers that came through here were used to picking stuff out of a book. It was a bit alien to them to work on a piece together.

"Also, if you are working on a design there in front of the customer, they feel that they are a part of it, and helping to design a piece with you. It adds so much more to the experience. Customer service is key and that is one thing when I set this shop up that helped. When I first opened, I was quite young and I had just got into tattooing, I didn't have much coverage myself and a lot of people felt quite intimidated going into tattoo studios back then. But the shop was clean and I don't think I looked that intimidating; I used to get a lot of women coming in because of this back in the early days. We were just trying to change the stereotype of tattoo shops really. It's funny cause sometimes people would walk in and go, 'are you the tattooist? You don't look old enough to be a tattooist!'"

And Matt still doesn't look old enough to be a tattooist, but he has the years and the loyal customer support behind him to prove it. And more than anything, he has the belief that dedication, passion and determination will see you through. As they say, the good will out. And with young tattooists like Matt and the rest of the lads at Inspirations championing the tattoo world, the future looks very bright. The future looks inspired.

CRAIG WILSON

After leaving school I never really knew what I wanted to do, apart from being a Ghostbuster but apparently that isn't a real career choice! I started my tattoo apprenticeship with Matt when I was eighteen. I walked into the shop to get a tattoo off him and had my 'tramp stamp'. Whilst he had me bent over a chair for two hours we suddenly became very close and I told him I'd just finished my course at Leeds College in Art & Design. After a lot of chatting and moaning (from the pain of the tattoo of course) he asked me if I would be interested in working Saturdays in the shop, and of course, I snapped his hand off – not literally. As you can see from my work I'm heavily into new school but from working alongside such great artists I get a lot of advice and influence from so many different styles, which I try and adapt into my own work. I'd like to say thank you to all the other tattoo artists that have given me advice and tips and have taken time out to put up with my annoying questions. If you have managed to get to the bottom of this without falling asleep thank you for reading.

WHEN I FIRST OPENED, I WAS QUITE YOUNG AND I HAD JUST GOT INTO TATTOOING, I DIDN'T HAVE MUCH COVERAGE MYSELF AND A LOT OF PEOPLE FELT QUITE INTIMIDATED GOING INTO TATTOO STUDIOS BACK THEN. BUT THE SHOP WAS CLEAN AND I DON'T THINK I LOOKED THAT INTIMIDATING

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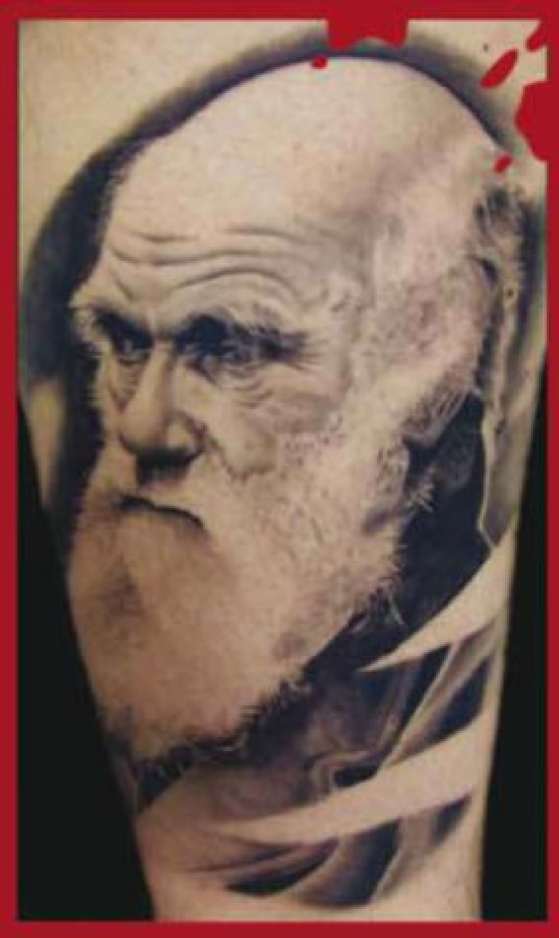
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A PERFECT CIRCLE

There's a fine line between purposefulness and obsession. Mike Toth, from Toth Art Collective, is straddling that line. As a kid he had to bandage his hands after receiving scabs from constantly washing his hand. As a tattooist he's never satisfied and sometimes lies sleepless after having seen someone else master a technique better than him…



STUDIO DETAILS
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"My least favourite thing to do is sleep. I sleep around four hours a night and get up early. I'm lucky I've got a manager now who takes care of a lot of shit so I can accomplish my goals."

For most people, working and living conditions like these would be unbearable, but Mike Toth doesn't seem to function like most people. He's sitting on a couch next to me at the Lady Luck convention in Reno. In the chair next to us sits Collin Eder, his manager, whose body is covered in Mike's artwork: "I'm like his walking portfolio," he says. "I started off as a client so I've seen his progress and I've got to say, I have never met a more motivated person. He's never satisfied and always pushes himself. There's no one at the same level around here."

"It drives me nuts if someone is doing something better than me," Mike continues. "I dwell on it and lie in bed, thinking about it. It comes from having OCD as a kid. In elementary school they wouldn't let me wash my hands. I got scabs from washing them so much so I had to bandage them. It's kind of funny I have this job where hygiene is so important…"



Simon Lundh

www.skindeep.co.uk







However, tattooing was far from his first career choice. Basically he hadn't drawn a picture until he was 19 years old. His first passion, while growing up in the cheese capital of Oregon, Tillamook, where the school sports teams are called The Cheesemakers and the students dress up as cows for the games, was ironically a very dirty one.

"I started racing motocross when I was about six. I was very serious about it, trying to make it my career and my parents were very supportive." Tragically the dream ended when he was 17 years old. "I was in a bad wreck. I broke my back and my pelvis, and after that I was too scared to go

IT DRIVES ME NUTS IF SOMEONE IS DOING SOMETHING BETTER THAN ME. I DWELL ON IT AND LIE IN BED, THINKING ABOUT IT



for it so I quit. That freed up a lot of time for other things I didn't know I was interested in. Racing was the only thing I did up to that point."

He later graduated high school, moved to Phoenix and started getting tattoos. "I started to get interested in art and I had no money so I just sat in my apartment and drew pictures all day." In 2005. Mike Toth turned 20 years old and got an apprenticeship at Elite Tattoo in Scottsdale.

"That didn't last long though. My roommates were interested in other things than tattooing, so I went back to Oregon, where you need a license to tattoo. I made a friend who'd been

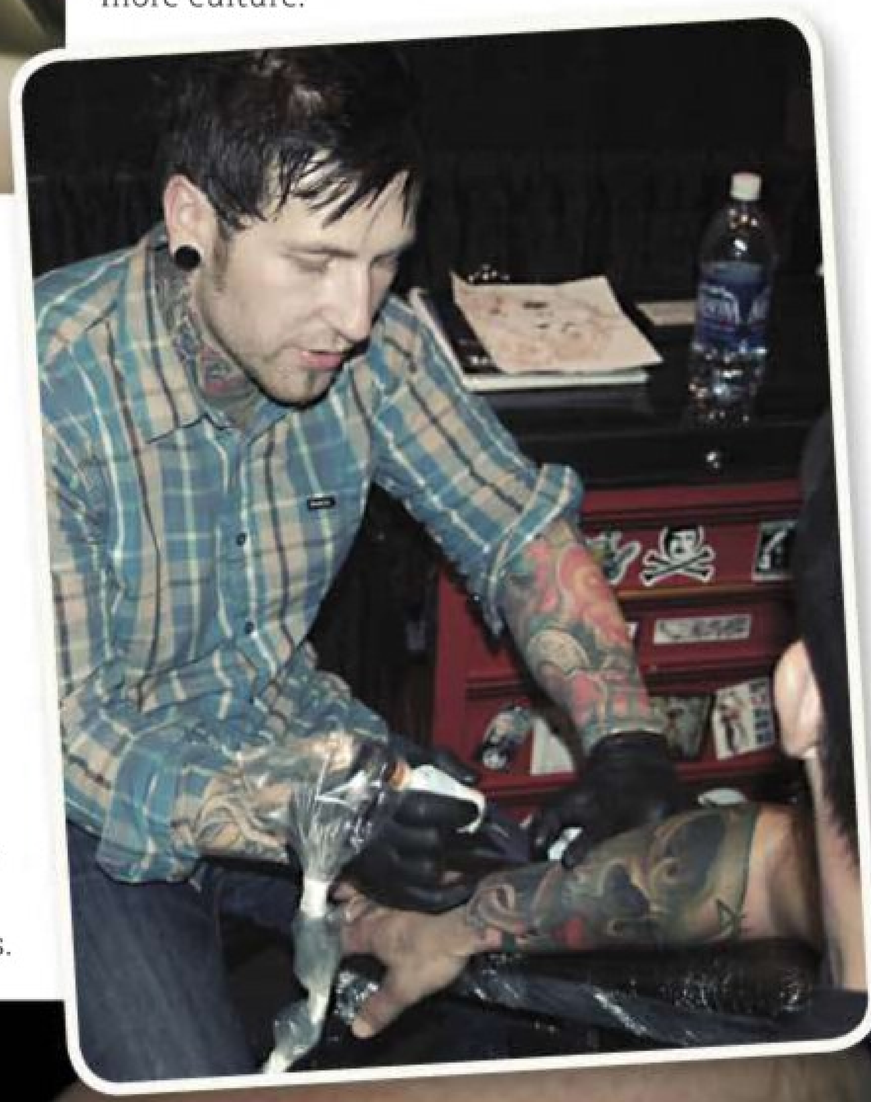
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His studio is located in downtown Bend with a gallery in front and studio in the back.

"It's awesome, but it was hard to get. The city is strict about the storefront. You have to call in these Bend historians to approve it so they charge 250 dollars just to stand there and look at a sign. It's retarded, but it's going really good now. There are a lot of high end, fine art galleries with bronze sculptures of horses and cowboys and so on in Bend. When I asked around, none of the gallery managers would allow my art, but now we've got a place where more modern artists can showcase their art. We also want to ship in art from artists all over the country to bring in more culture.



MY WIFE WANTED TO MOVE SOMEWHERE WARMER AND IT SOUNDED LIKE A GOOD OFFER, SO WE SPENT ALL OUR MONEY CLOSING UP THE SHOP FOR WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE A REALLY BAD DEAL...

tattooing for 18 years and he helped me out."

Thus, at the end of 2006 he moved to his current hometown, Bend, Oregon, and started working in a street shop where he tattooed flash for a couple of years before he got his own studio – which he sold not long after.

"I got a job offer in San Luis Obispo, California. My wife wanted to move somewhere warmer and it sounded like a good offer, so we spent all our money closing up the shop for what turned out to be a really bad deal. It was horrible. The owner totally lied to me so we moved back after a month. I now realise the value of a loyal clientele. I can't believe I even considered moving!"

But time moves on and since the beginning of this year, Mike Toth now has the facilities of his dreams.





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"We've had a lot of support from the city, though," Collin adds, "and we've had a good response."

"Yeah, the president of the downtown association was 'glad to see that we had that real punk rock feel.' Punk rock? Really?"

Mike's own art style is very similar to his tattooing: "I started tattooing right after I started drawing and I had been tattooing for three years before I began painting. I couldn't draw to save myself in the beginning and the first six months my painting was horrible."

Today Mike Toth's life isn't really what he pictured, growing up a young motocross enthusiast in Tillamook, Oregon. "I really miss doing something physical, where you go out every day, get some exercise and get dirty. But I'm focusing all my energy on my family and my own progress now. I have no free time to do anything else. Not even to sleep."

NONE OF THE GALLERY MANAGERS WOULD ALLOW MY ART, BUT NOW WE'VE GOT A PLACE WHERE MORE MODERN ARTISTS CAN SHOWCASE THEIR ART



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LA BELLE PROVINCE

For many Montrealers, September is synonymous with the last chance of the year to be a social butterfly before temperatures plummet and freezing off body parts you didn't even know you had becomes a harsh reality. Festivals and exhibitions of all sorts fill up to-do lists and calendars, with one of the yearly highlights none other than, you guessed it, a tattoo convention



Fusing the worlds of tattooing and fine art for almost a decade now, Art Tattoo Montreal continues to prove it is a strong voice and unforgettable presence on the convention circuit. With an overwhelming number of tattoo conventions popping up all over the globe, it is seemingly becoming harder to be unique and to truly impress. But if this year's turnout and feedback are any indication, Art Tattoo Montreal's unique touch and ability to please both artists and tattoo collectors alike has become sort of their thing.

Organized in part by local studio TattooMania, the 9th edition of Art Tattoo Montreal set up shop in Windsor Station from September 8-11. This may be a good point to pause and give a notable mention to the venue because, let's face it, how many conventions can boast about being held in a place as unique as an old train station, which was completed in 1913, located in the heart of an urban city? With its glass ceiling, signature Montreal charm and vast open space, Windsor station may no longer be a working train station, but it is certainly the best place in town to house over 200 local and international tattoo artists.

> THE 2011 SPECIAL GUEST WAS NONE OTHER THAN RUTH "RUTHLESS" PINEDA; YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF THE FEISTY TATTOOER, AS SHE WAS ON A LITTLE SHOW CALLED LA INK...

Following their tried and true formula for success, the convention was kicked off with the (non-skin) art component of Art Tattoo Montreal. Taking place at the Fresh Paint Gallery, this year's exhibit was all about local Quebec artists capturing what they perceived to be the essence of home sweet home.

Close to 30 artists from across the province produced original works for the exposition, which was fittingly entitled La Belle Province (or The Beautiful Province, Quebec's longtime nickname), and included Quebecois staples such as lumberjacks, fleur-de-lys and portraits of former Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

Now, for the tattoo component of Art Tattoo Montreal. I arrived at the convention in the middle of the afternoon on Saturday, and walking up and down the rows of artists had already begun becoming tricky, as utterly concentrated convention-goers strategically maneuvered between stations, stopping to flip through portfolios and consider potential artists, determined to make their dream tattoos a reality.

MONTREAL (I)
Montreal is located in the southwest of the province of Quebec. The city proper covers most of the Island of Montreal at the confluence of the Saint Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers. The port of Montreal lies at one end of the Saint Lawrence Seaway, which is the river gateway that stretches from the Great Lakes into the Atlantic Ocean. Montreal is defined by its location in between the St. Lawrence river on its south, and by the Rivière des Prairies on its north. The city is named after the most prominent geographical feature on the island, a three-head hill called Mount Royal, topped at 232m above sea level.

The space between tattooers sometimes became tight, especially when multiple artists at a station were working at once, but I suppose that was to be expected, and it certainly didn't stop clients from embarking on extremely ambitious, sizeable pieces.

With a constant flow of tattoo collectors entering Windsor station, many of them on the hunt for new ink, a new phenomenon I had never noticed before at Art Tattoo Montreal seemed to emerge in the number of artists who were completely booked up for the weekend. But with the array of talent attending and the surprising number of enthusiasts well into the process of getting their second or third tattoos of the convention by midday, perhaps this trend was nothing but inevitable.

Known for their ability to bring out the big guns, so to speak, this year's Art Tattoo Montreal was no different. The 2011 special guest was none other than Ruth 'Ruthless' Pineda; you

Barbara Pavone

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may have heard of the feisty tattooer, as she was on a little show called LA Ink. Dressed in sky-high heels and a pink skull-adorned apron, she is one artist you probably wouldn't want to mess with. Although, judging by the interactions I observed between Ruthless and her clients and fans, I have a feeling she might secretly be a big softy inside.

Other American tattoo superstars included Chad Koeplinger, Grime, Ron Wells (whose signage wittily informed the public that he was a "Gassssy American" and "I ain't got shit to look"), and Jason Schroder (whose tattoo dolls stopped me in my tracks, along with the artwork and tattoo machines on his desk, of course, and just so happen to be the coolest home accessories, well, ever).

Briefly returning to the aforementioned trend of fully booked tattoo artists, I soon discovered that Grime was, unfortunately for me, a part of this club. Yours truly tried. Really tried. But it was not to be. So the lesson learned from all of this is that if you're dead set on working with a particular artist, for goodness sake, book an appointment before the convention begins.

Although, I must say, watching Grime work was still a treat. A small group gathered around his work area as the San Francisco-based artist meticulously etched away at a large-scale shark on a lucky gentleman's forearm, headphones in ears, his concentration at an almost indescribable level. The result was undoubtedly badass.

Europe was also well represented with Art Tattoo Montreal veterans from France's Tin-Tin Tatouage and Mystery Tattoo Club once again returning to the Paris of North America.

But the real focus of this 9th edition was the homegrown talent, with 63 Canadian shops showing off their tattoo skills. And, it must be said, Canadians may just have the best sense of humor and the greatest amount of creativity when it comes to naming their tattoo shops. Five Fathoms, Burning Monk, Sugar Shack... you get the picture.

Sharing the historic Windsor train station with the artists was the La Belle Province art exhibit, which was transferred over from the gallery, as well as numerous performers and curiosities.

Live painting on canvas stopped passersbys in their tracks, as did the numerous naked females throughout the venue who were being spray painted from head to toe with body suits that transformed them into mythical women of the future. French transplant Scarlett James treated the crowd to burlesque performances throughout the weekend and rockabilly band Joe Henry & The Rockin' Bones took care of the music.

However, one of the most buzzed about guests by far, for both positive and negative reasons, was Montreal's own Zombie Boy.

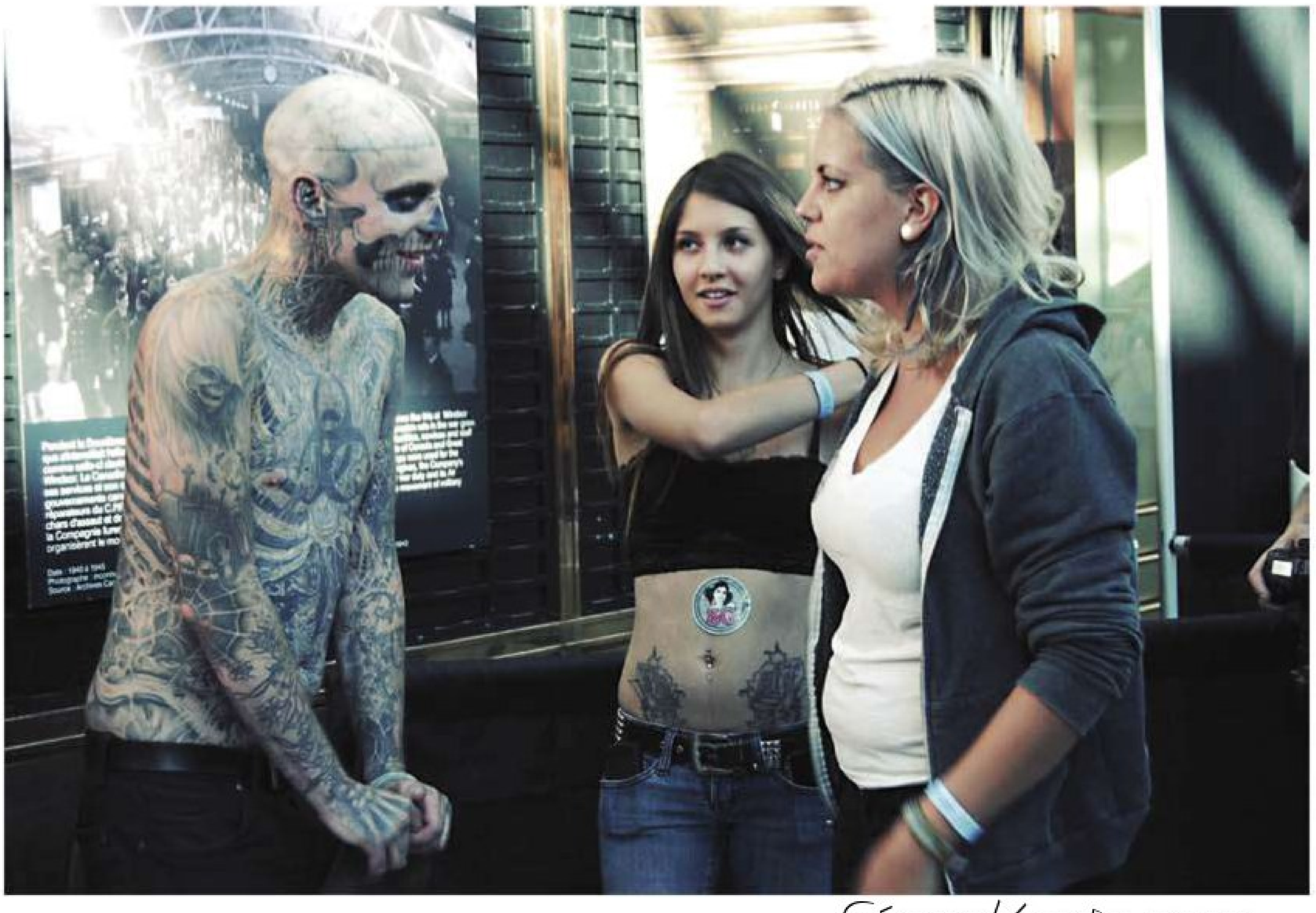
A SMALL GROUP GATHERED AROUND GRIME'S WORK AREA AS HE METICULOUSLY ETCHED AWAY AT A LARGE-SCALE SHARK ON A LUCKY GENTLEMAN'S FOREARM – HIS CONCENTRATION AT AN ALMOST INDESCRIBABLE LEVEL. THE RESULT WAS UNDOUBTEDLY BADASS



MONTREAL (II)
Nicknamed la ville aux cent clochers (the city of a hundred steeples), Montreal is renowned for its churches. Mark Twain once noted, "This is the first time I was ever in a city where you couldn't throw a brick without breaking a church window." The city has four Roman Catholic basilicas: Mary, Queen of the World Cathedral, the aforementioned Notre-Dame Basilica, St. Patrick's Basilica, and Saint Joseph's Oratory. The Oratory is the largest church in Canada, with the second largest copper dome in the world after that of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Rick Genest, better known as Zombie Boy, used to be an instantly recognizable street kid, known for being fully tattooed with bones, insects, etc. I mean, there's a reason why he's chosen to be called Zombie Boy. Once a squeegee kid, I used to run into at bars across the city; Genest blew into the realm of stardom when he was featured in Lady Gaga's 'Born This Way' music video and photographed as model for Thierry Mugler ads.

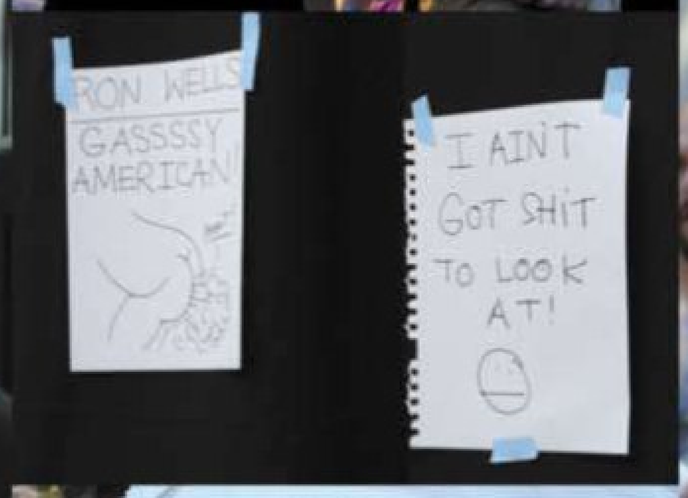
Whereas people used to stare for all the wrong reasons, now individuals were lining up to take photos with Genest, shirts emblazoned with his face were being sold and autographed head shots were being snapped up by fans. Make of that what you will, ladies and gentlemen.



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Not to be forgotten, the ever important, although not always as prominently represented, traditional realm of tattooing was brought to Montreal by the skilled hands of Japan's Horishin and Horimasa and the artists of China's YZ Tattoo. An Orimasa Tebori seminar also allowed for the chance to get a closer look at Japanse hand poke tattooing and take part in an intimate Q&A session with Horimasa Sensei.

Original artworks and prints by a variety of artists, along with accessories, clothing, shoes and books were also scattered throughout Windsor station; a constant reminder that wherever you go these days, a little touch of consumerism and smart branding is likely to be present.

> CANADIANS MAY JUST HAVE THE BEST SENSE OF HUMOR AND THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF CREATIVITY WHEN IT COMES TO NAMING THEIR TATTOO SHOPS. FIVE FATHOMS, BURNING MONK, SUGAR SHACK... YOU GET THE PICTURE...

As this year's edition of Art Tattoo Montreal wrapped up on Sunday evening after three action-packed days, the only thing on everyone's mind was how organizers will possibly outshine themselves next year. And since 2012 will mark a decade of the convention's great presence in the industry, they'll really need to think way, way out of the box.

But if anyone knows how to throw a good party, it's the people of Quebec. So if I may be so bold as to make a suggestion, I recommend that everyone get their fleur-de-lys out, brush up on their French, prepare their palates for the culinary wonder that is poutine (i.e. French fries topped with a mountain of gooey cheese curds and hot gravy) and get on that plane to help Art Tattoo Montreal celebrate its tenth birthday in La Belle Province.

MONTREAL (III)

The 2006 census reported that in the Greater Montreal Area, 66.5% spoke French as a first language, followed by English at 13.2%, while 0.8% spoke both as a first language. [80] The remaining 22.5% of Montreal-area residents are allophones, speaking languages including Italian (3.5%), Arabic (3.1%), Spanish (2.6%), Creole (1.3%), Chinese (1.2%), Greek (1.2%), Portuguese (0.8%), Romanian (0.7%), Vietnamese (0.7%), and Russian (0.5%). In terms of additional languages spoken, a unique feature of Montreal among Canadian cities, noted by Statistics Canada, is the working knowledge of both French and English possessed by most of its residents.

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Letters

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faith in the way tattoo magazines can and will represent tattooed women.

Emma

Thanks for sharing Emma – this is an issue that's as long and complicated beneath the surface as time itself. Anybody interested in reading Emma's excellent blog post can find it here: http://penandinked.wordpress.com/2011/09/07/the-tattooed-beauty-myth/.

Letter of the Month



Tattoo or art? Is there a difference?

I was just approaching my 16th birthday (tut tut!) when I got my first tattoo, a unicorn on my upper right arm. Over the following thre to four years I had another five. So by the time I was 20 years old, I had four on my arms and two on my back. I am often asked if I regret getting them, to which my reply is always, "no, I just wish they were better!"

I am now 42 years old and have decided that it is time to do something about them and indeed, make them better. On my first trip to a tattoo studio all those years ago. all I knew was that I wanted a tattoo, not really caring what of! I spent some time looking through a catalogue of pictures, picked one out and got it tattooed on my arm, and there it was... forever!

That's kind of how it went with all of my early tattoos.

As I am now a lot older and a little more sensible (debatable) the whole tattoo experience has been completely different. Firstly, I spent quite a bit of time deciding what design I would like (the existing unicorn built up with a wizard). The next step was to search through magazines and the internet to get a clear picture in my head of exactly what I wanted.

After that, I needed to find the artist that I would trust to do the work. It was vital that I made the right decision. I didn't just want another tattoo, I wanted a piece of art, and I stumbled across an amazing artist whilst looking through Skin Deep. I saw a full-page advert with three pictures on it, all very good. It was from a studio in Gosport called Inklination. I went onto their website and was impressed by the work displayed on there, none more so than Ceridwen William's gallery. Her work is excellent and Ceri became my chosen one!

I paid a visit to the studio and chatted through my design before booking an appointment. I was totally gobsmacked when I was told that the earliest appointment was four months down the line. This confirmed that I had made the right choice. You don't have a four month waiting list for no reason. The difficult part was waiting patiently for my turn. As excited as a kid on Christmas Eve I counted down the weeks and months.

The concern I had was that in my mind I had built the tattoo up to be fantastic, it was going to be great. This left Ceri with a lot to live up to. I needn't have worried. Although not quite finished, Ceri has nailed it! It is perfect! Now it's my tattoo that is in their advert and I couldn't be more proud! (see photo). Was it worth the wait? You bet! I now have an amazing piece of art on my arm, not just another tattoo. Now for the next one.

Dave Jones

Thanks Dave – always nice to hear a great story. Keep them coming!



A grey matter issue

I am writing to tell you what a great article I thought 'Only Women Bleed' was (no.202). And to thank you, really for publishing such an interesting, enlightening and thought-provoking piece.

The article jumped out at me for a few reasons; One – it was a really interesting article and that's always good in a tattoo mag, two – I am a tattooed woman, and three – it's a subject close to my heart.

I am currently studying for my PhD (only part-time study, my other time is spent being a domestic abuse adviser and a Mum). My PhD is in Gender Studies & Sociology, focusing upon heavily tattooed women and the way society perceives them. I want to look at the idea that if a tattooed woman over-compensates for her 'deviance' via other means, such as overtly 'feminine' clothes or make-up, she can just about 'get away' with being tattooed... in the eyes of the non-tattooed community.

Your article was a breath of fresh air, and very timely – I had just drafted a blog post about my thoughts, and about my recent experience with a tattoo magazine (not Skin Deep, I have to say!). The article has renewed my



@kat_vega "bought @**SkinDeepMag** today. @**Ms_Hollywood_H** on the cover & Craigy Lee wearing a KCF shirt courtesy of **@ashcantfly** -small world! "

@Ashiz13 "Bought TattooBible2 (from the Publishers of **@SkinDeepMag**) today, so far it's an efin awesome read. Gonna see If I can get the 1st one now"

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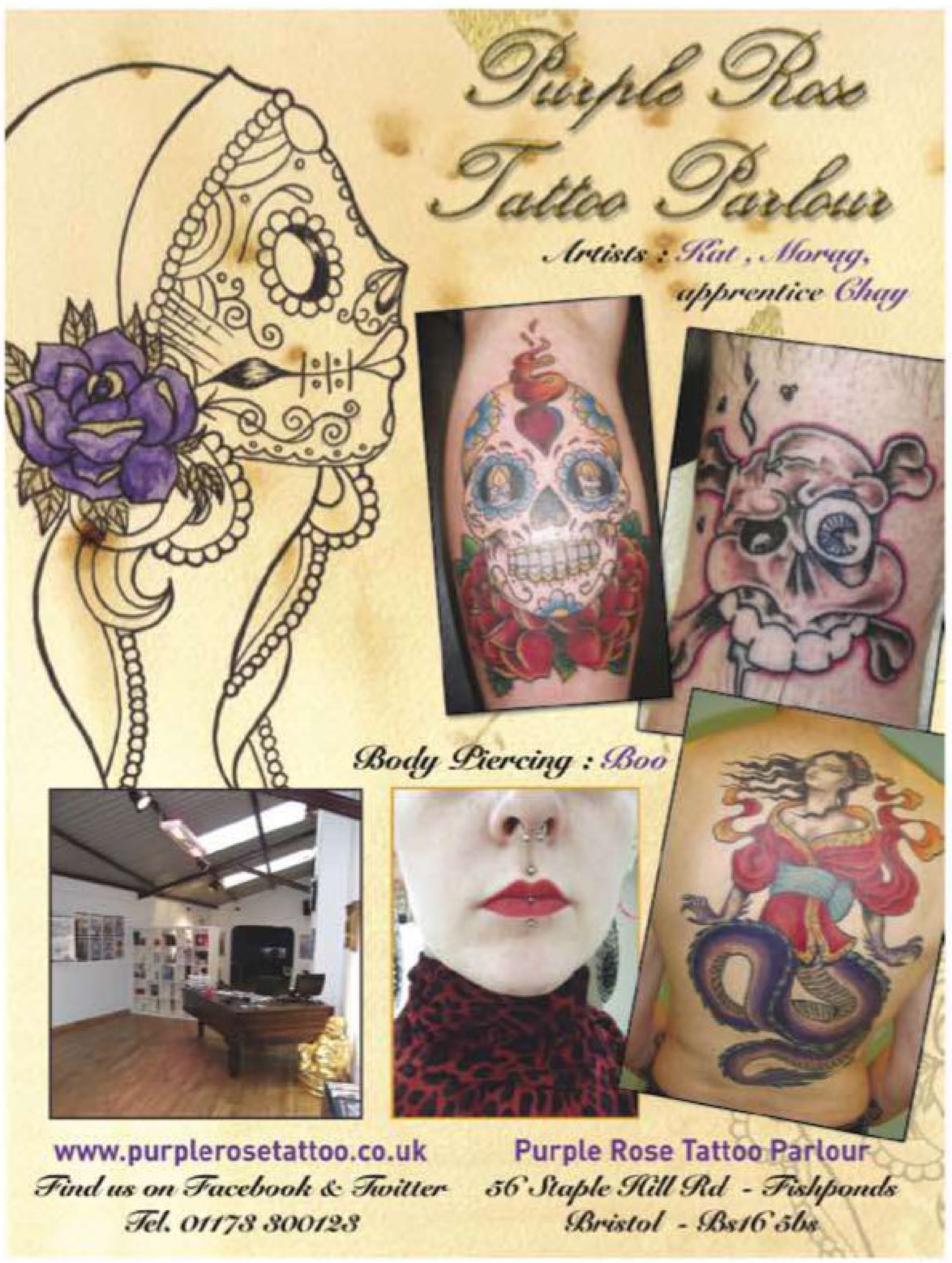
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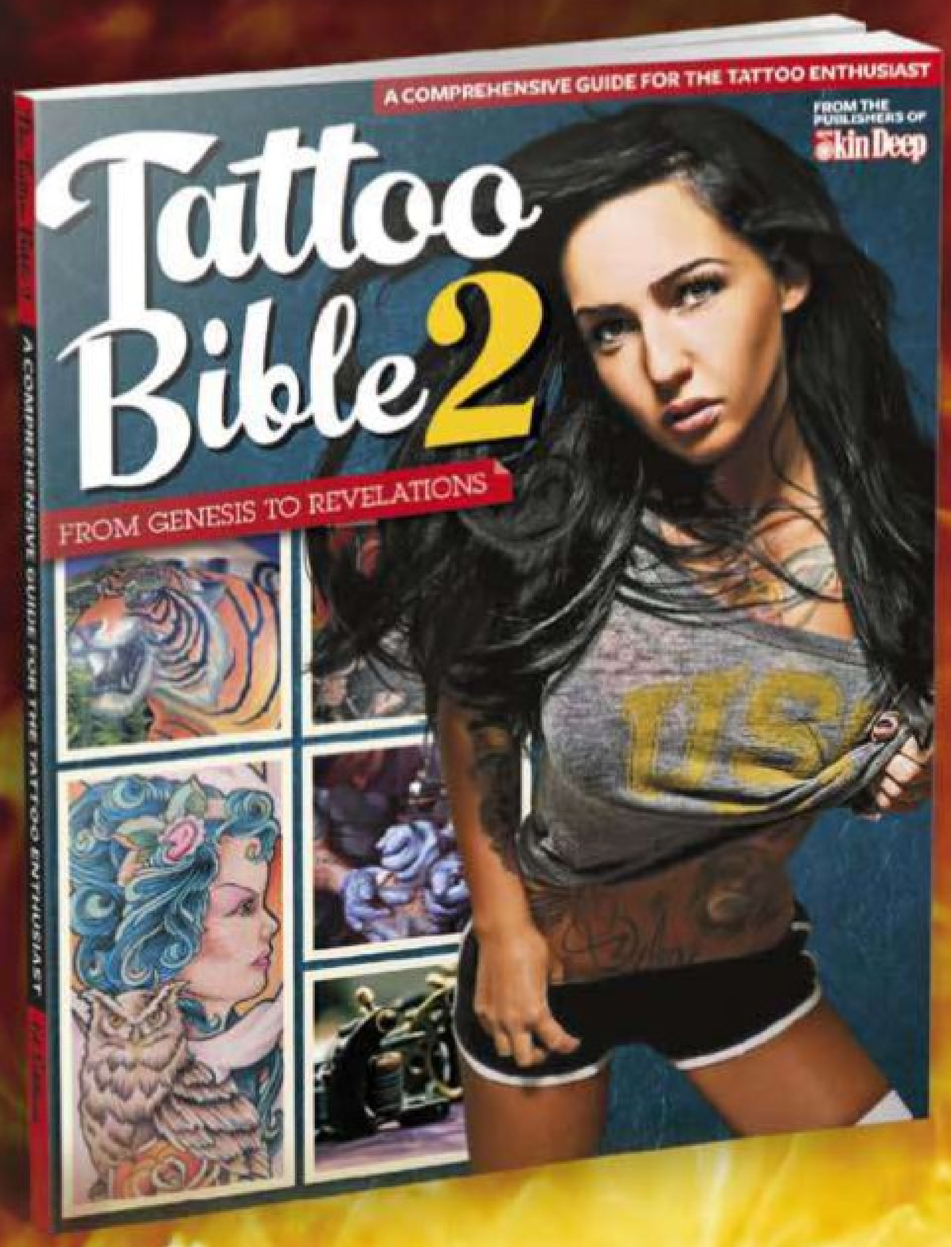
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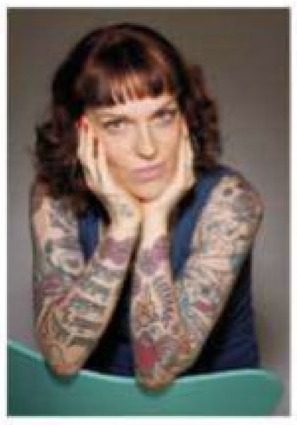
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REGRETS, I'VE HAD A FEW, BUT THEN AGAIN...

Is there a tattooed person on that planet that hasn't heard the phrase, "you'll regret that when you are older" at least once?



Paula Hardy-Kangelos

Regret is a powerful idea, an idea that has often been represented in the arts, and one that seems to preoccupy the thoughts and words of many. This threatened fear of future regret can, sadly, prevent us from doing as we wish in the here and now.

Being tattooed can be a huge part of one's existence – I wouldn't go as far as to say that my tattoos have made me who I am, but I believe they are certainly as big a part as any of the other determining factors that form individual personalities; genetics, gender, class, geography, education, et al – is it even possible to regret such a large part of who we are?

That's not to say that all tattoo journeys are without regret, but it's not often the becoming tattooed that is regretted, rather the minutiae; individual tattoos, such as arm bands that stand in the way of previously unimagined sleeves or work in a style that does not complement subsequent tattoos collected.

A tale of regret can only ever be personal, based as it is on experience and emotion, so will I regret my tattoos? I doubt it. With the benefit of, so far, only partial hindsight what 'regrets' do I have? Not very many, actually.

That doesn't mean all my tattoos are designer perfect, although they could have been, if I had desired perfection, but no, I have my fair share of poor quality and even downright bad tattoos, and to be fair, I deserve them. They are traces of jokes, of impulses or prizes won playing bad tattoo roulette (rules: enter previously unheard of tattoo shop, pick minimum price design from the wall, have said design tattooed immediately). This always fun activity has resulted in several below par tattoos, a couple of mediocre ones and a single incredibly good one, which was frankly, most surprising – after all, bad tattoo roulette is diametrically opposed to the rules on how to get a good tattoo (research, research, research, waiting list, don't economise but save for quality work).

WILL I REGRET MY TATTOOS? I DOUBT IT. WITH THE BENEFIT OF, SO FAR, ONLY PARTIAL HINDSIGHT WHAT 'REGRETS' DO I HAVE? NOT VERY MANY, ACTUALLY

I don't regret the ex's name, now partially obscured by a comedy scribble, nor any of the pictorial content, not even Hello Kitty. Even the less well crafted tattoos do not concern me. Like all tattoos they are a reminder of a time, a place and a story and for me, that time capsule-like narrative will always be the point of interest.

Another reason for my less-than-perfect ink, the donation of blank skin to apprentice tattooers. Some of my very favourite people have practised tattooing on a little patch of me and I wear their early etchings with pride. After all, what would tattooing be without the faith and support of the artist's patron when the canvas is skin and the paint is permanent? Or at least, almost permanent. Laser technology and cleverly thought out cover-ups mean that one no longer is truly stuck with a regretted tattoo, it may well not be possible to erase every mark without trace but all can be faded and disguised, and if a design is altered, associated meaning, also regretted, can be changed too.

I am pleased that these options exist for those that require them, but for me laser is not necessary – not because I am content with each mark and line on my body, but rather, because I long ago decided that 'next!' was the best strategy for me; my bad tattoos are both disguised and highlighted by the other tattoos that surround (and sometimes, overlap) them.

At the very beginning of my personal journey into collecting tattoos, Alex Binnie, world-renowned custom artist and founder of Into You, told me that part of being a real tattoo fan was having at least one bad tattoo – and even though times have changed and it's now perfectly possible to have a whole body suit without entering into the trial and error experiment that was once almost a necessity; I still think it's an interesting philosophy, one that brings to mind an interest in the power of the permanent mark, quite separate to aesthetic fashions or artistic endeavour.

I've learnt to think of my own bad tattoos as souvenirs of my tattoo related adventures. They indicate my excitement, enthusiasm and my commitment to all things tattoo. I've been marked by almost 40 people, from international superstars to newbie apprentices, and I don't regret any of it or any of them, not even for a minute. I hope you all feel the same.

"A man is not old until his regrets take the place of his dreams"

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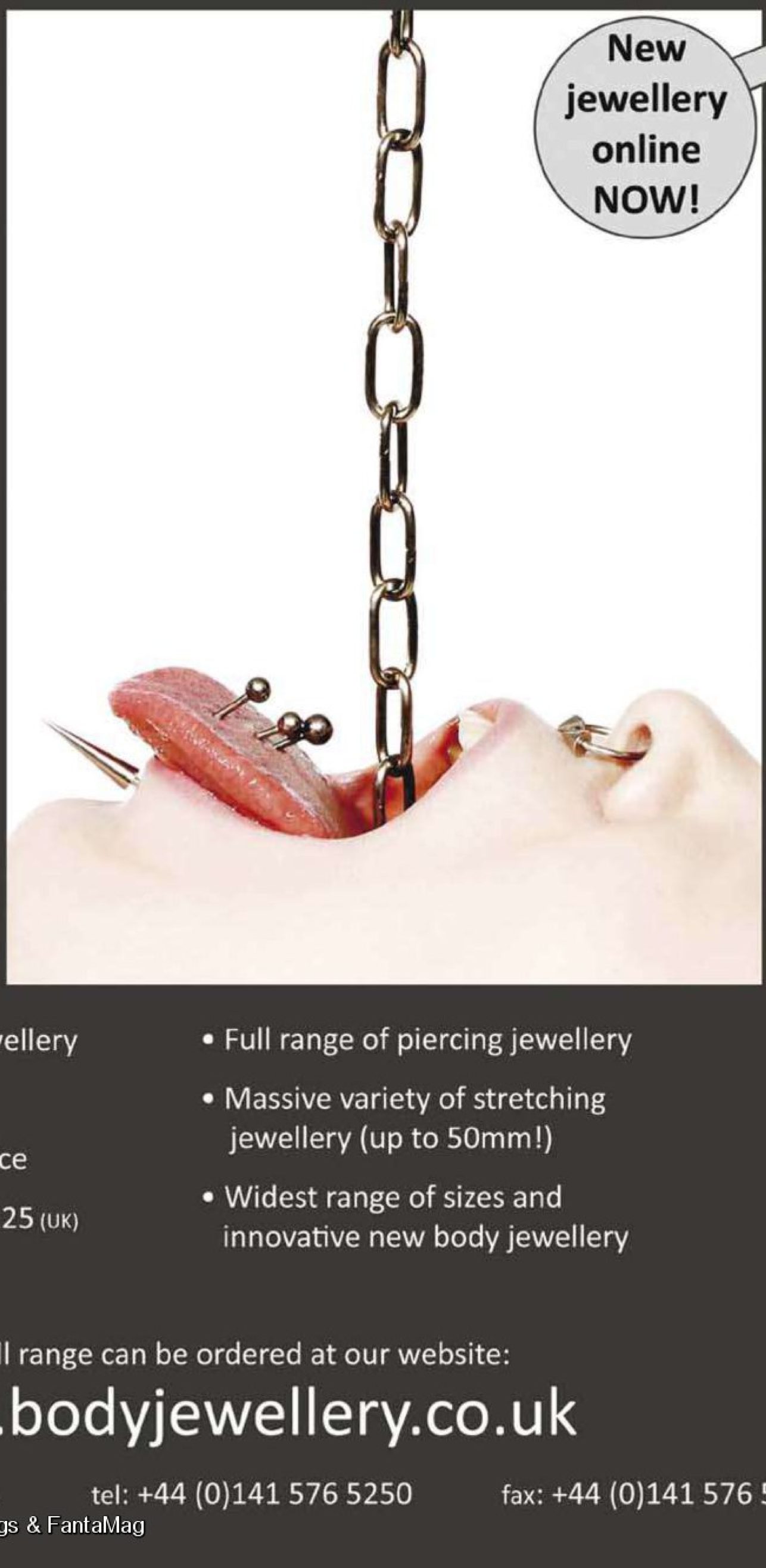
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